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A N O V E L.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

EXPECT NOT A STORY DECK'D IN THE GARB OF *romance*
FANCY,—BUT LOOK AT HOME,

VOLUME II.

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H O M E.

CHAPTER I.

CONSTANTIA left Oak Hill in a very unhappy state of mind. The information Harriet Hargrave had given her of Valmonsor, rendered his conduct inexplicable, and excited the most painful apprehensions; but how great was her mortification, on arriving at Ornvile, to find that he had dined there!—She thought it very unfortunate that she had gone to Oak Hill, and determined that she would not leave home again till she saw him.

His visit, however, afforded her relief. She hoped the cause of his absence was now over, and that he would return in a day or two to explain it.

But this explanation he seemed in no haste to give ; for day after day elapsed without his appearing. His conduct was so extraordinary, that even the supposition of her having become indifferent to him, could not, she thought, account for it ; as it would be easier, and more proper, to accompany her to Willowfield, without coming to the eclaireissement she expected, than to behave in this manner.

A week passed without her receiving the smallest intelligence of him ; and the state of expectation and perturbation she was constantly in, made her so restless and miserable, that she found no relief but in walking ; and every moment she could spend abroad, she sauntered near the house, or sat in the fields, where she could have a view of the road, on which she expected him to appear.

One evening she stole out unperceived, leaving Mrs. Almorne with her father and mother, and strolled down the avenue alone to indulge in reflection.

It was a fine serene evening of September ; the sky was clear, and the moon and stars shone with uncommon beauty.

“ Night is calm and fair ; blue, starry, settled is night. The winds with the clouds are gone—They sink behind the hill. The moon is up on the mountain. Trees glisten : —bright is the stream of the vale.”

Alas ! thought Constantia, how dependent a state is love !—With what pleasure should I have contemplated this scene a few months ago !—Delighted I should have listened to the soft rustling of the trees, and admired the beauty of the heavens ! how light would have been my steps,—how tranquil my feelings ! At peace with every human being ; without a wish beyond the hour, I should have been contented and happy.

Now, alas, how changed! the prey of a thousand fears! trembling with alarm at every sound, and harassed by the most painful conjectures! every object wears a melancholy aspect, without my having the power to subdue, for a moment, the miserable anxiety which renders me dependent on another!—Another whom I may never see again!—Would to heaven I could penetrate the veil that conceals him from my view, and unfold the mystery of his behaviour,—that I could see him without being seen. How anxiously would I observe his looks—his slightest gesture—the very walls which surround him;—for the little spot that contains him, is a world to me!

Full of these reflections, Constantia walked slowly on, hardly considering whither she went, or that she was unattended, till her recollection was awakened by seeing the lodge at the bottom of the avenue. She stopt at it a few moments, and then opened the gate, with the intention of viewing the landscape without, illumined by the moon.

She had proceeded but a few yards, when

the appearance of a man on horseback induced her to return. The instant she did so, he hastened on, and called to her to stop. She was too near the lodge to be alarmed, but was surprised at hearing him repeatedly call to her to stop; and, upon his coming up, a moment after, she discovered him to be her brother Frederick.

Joyful emotions instantly arose in the bosom of Constantia at the sight of a brother she tenderly loved; but they were soon damped by his appearance, which was different from what she had ever seen it before. His face was pale, his hair disordered, his manner melancholy; his whole appearance so strange, that she was extremely alarmed, and anxiously inquired if he was well?

“I am well in health,” replied he; “but I shall tell you more, when I have got quit of my horse.”

He then led it to the lodge; and giving it in charge to the porter, took Constantia by the arm, and, without speaking, led her up the avenue.

When he had advanced a little way, he told her that he was come to see her, and her alone. “For this purpose,” said he, “I have travelled, almost without stopping a moment, and have come, though I have hardly an hour to stay ; but I could not go without seeing you.”

“Go!” said Constantia; “whither are you going?”

“I should not tell you so abruptly ; but I have neither time nor recollection to be methodical.”

“Do not attempt it ; tell me only where you are going—your appearance terrifies me.”

“Well it may ; for I am truly wretched :—unexpected misfortune obliges me to leave England,—to abandon it with the certainty of being miserable wherever I go.”

He was proceeding ; but Constantia’s appearance stopped him. She grew so faint,

that he became alarmed ; and taking her in his arms, carried her to a seat ; where, in the most kind and soothing terms, he entreated forgiveness, for the distress he had occasioned her ; and severely reproached himself for his incautious behaviour.

“ Oh !” cried Constantia, “ think not of me ; but tell me what dreadful misfortune obliges you to fly your country ? What crime have you committed, that forces you to be an exile ?”

“ None, Constantia ; I have committed no crime.”

“ Thank heaven ! thank heaven ! if you are guiltless, you cannot be completely miserable.”

“ I am indeed guiltless ;—I am miserable ; but the cause brings no self-reproach.”

“ Oh ! how you relieve,—how greatly you relieve me ! but explain to me your situation.”

“ I see that I have cruelly, and unnecessarily alarmed you; but I felt myself so unhappy, that I forgot you might imagine greater distress than I suffered. My friend Evelyn has just now had the misfortune to lose great property; in consequence of which, he will be a bankrupt, and I must be involved in his fall. It was by my advice, he some years ago, engaged in an adventure, in which I assisted him as far as my credit could go. I did not then foresee the disastrous consequences of the war; and still less of my own imprudence: but I must now suffer from both. I shall be liable, for Evelyn’s debts, to the amount of eight thousand pounds; and though this sum would save me, and perhaps enable him to struggle successfully with his difficulties, I cannot raise even a part of it.”

“ Can it be impossible?”

“ Too certainly it is. You know how much my gaming debts have injured my credit, and distressed my father. When he gave me the last money for them, I vowed to

him, that he never should have another sixpence to pay for me; and I am determined he never shall: but to prevent it, I have no alternative but exile. If I remain in this country, I should be exposed to distresses, from which he would think himself obliged to relieve me; and I could neither bear the weight of his affliction, nor a train of other grievances, which would certainly follow my loss of fortune."

"Have you no generous friend, who in so blameless an emergency, would venture to assist you?"

"None. There is a man to whom I should willingly be obliged, if the sum were less, or he had not already repeatedly relieved my embarrassments. Sir Esmond Anson could easily, and I believe would readily assist me; but after the obligations he has laid me under, it would be humiliating, and altogether improper to apply to him. To Mrs. Almonie I have the same objection; even supposing she had the money: I am not now in debt

to either, but I have too often been a trouble to both."

"Would to heaven I could command the money left me by Lady Anson; you might then, perhaps, be able to obtain the rest by some means or other.

"Can you imagine, my dear sister, that I would take advantage of your goodness, to rob you? Could I take from you the little that you have?—How different you are from Hastings! Can I believe you are both the offspring of the same parents?

"On the first knowledge of Evelyn's misfortune, I applied to Hastings, to know if he would aid me in borrowing the money; for with his assistance I might command it. He knows Evelyn to be a man of industry and probity; who will do every thing in his power, to repair his losses; and whose affairs may be retrievable, if he is now supported. I offered to limit my expenses to the smallest compass possible, that the debt might be paid by instalments, as quickly as

my income would permit ; but he would not consent to risk any money on such frail security as Evelyn's life and mine. Considering the weight of his own expenses, I might have forgiven his refusal, if it had not been accompanied with reproaches. He said that he was surprised at my request, when he had already been so great a sufferer by me ; that my extravagance had cost my father great sums ; and he considered every sixpence I received beyond a younger brother's portion, a direct robbery of him."

" Can he be a brother ?"

" A most unkind one. I believe he was sorry, on reflection, that he had laid himself so open to my view ; but I was glad that he did so : for, although I was hurt with his behaviour, I should have been sorry to have remained ignorant of his disposition."

" But are there no means,—no means whatever of relief ?"

" None ; I have no resource. How se-

verely, Constantia, may we suffer by a single error! I had hoped, all the ill consequences of my gaming were at an end; but we know not the wide train of evils which may arise from one imprudent act."

"Have you well considered the misery your departure will bring upon my father? By seeking to save him from a mere inconvenience, you will draw upon him a load of affliction."

"I have reflected on my situation in every particular, and am well convinced the scheme I have adopted, is the wisest I can pursue. There are circumstances, I cannot explain to you, which would render me peculiarly miserable in this country, under any reverse of fortune; I must therefore leave it."

"But where is it, my dear Frederick, you would go?"

"To America. I mean to leave every thing I have to Evelyn's creditors, and seek in America that independence, which is the

only blessing of life I can now expect. You know how happy our friend Harrington is there. He has often desired me to come to him, if ever I should be disgusted with England; and, I am persuaded, that with him I shall find a refuge from the evils I most dread. But I keep you too long in the air; let us go into the house: I will go round by the back stairs to your apartment, and will there tell you more particularly my plan."

"I will first," said Constantia, "step in by the front door, to let Mrs. Almorne, (who is with my father and mother,) know where I am, lest they should be uneasy at my absence."

They then proceeded towards the house, at a little distance from which, Constantia left him.

In a short time she returned, and conducted him, unobserved, to her apartment.

He no sooner entered it, than, looking round with an aspect of sorrow and despair,

he exclaimed, "Good Heaven! can this be the last time I shall ever be in this house! shall I never again see my father and mother! nor ever more, my beloved Constantia, meet with you in scenes so dear to us both!"

"You will never leave them," cried Constantia; "my father will not permit you to go."

"He will know nothing of my departure, till I am gone. I could not see him,—and fear I have done wrong in seeing you: Your tenderness unmans me, and will destroy yourself: but when I am far distant, the remembrance of you will at once be my sorrow and delight."

She answered only by tears, and he was too much agitated to attempt soothing her; till the sound of a footstep, with a gentle tap at the door, roused them.—They listened a moment, and heard Mrs. Almorne beg to be admitted.

Constantia opened the door, and taking

her by the hand, led her into the adjoining apartment.

“What is the matter with you, my dear?” said Mrs. Almorne; “your countenance down stairs alarmed, and now it terrifies me.”

“Do not be alarmed, my dear Madam,” replied Constantia; “and forgive me if I cannot immediately tell you my distress.”

“I would not urge it improperly,” returned Mrs. Almorne; “but you must be sensible how very miserable I shall be till I know it.”

Constantia was afraid of distressing Frederick, by discovering his situation to Mrs. Almorne; yet she was hardly less afraid of afflicting the latter, by not explaining the cause of her unhappiness. She hesitated what she ought to do, till Mrs. Almorne, becoming more alarmed by her silence, earnestly conjured her to keep her no longer in ignorance.

Constantia could not withstand her en-

treaties, and gave her the information she desired, as concisely as she could.

Mrs. Almorne listened quietly, without betraying any emotion, that Constantia could discover by the light which the moon afforded; and when she ceased speaking, replied, “ I am grieved for your brother, my dear, and shall see him for a minute before his departure; but I must first return to your mother who is uneasy at your absence. Beg of him to wait for me; I shall not detain him long.”

In about ten minutes, she returned with a light, and was immediately admitted into the room where Frederick was.

As he advanced to meet her, she took him kindly by the hand, and put a paper into it.

It was a draft for 8000*l*.

Overpowered by surprise, he reeled back a few paces, and threw himself into a chair.

Constantia, who saw the draft, and in whom it excited only the most joyful and grateful emotions, instantly threw herself into the arms of Mrs. Almorne, and poured forth the warmest acknowledgments of her goodness.

Mrs. Almorne tenderly embraced her; but begged she would think only of her brother, whose appearance discovered the most cruel agitation.

These words roused him,—he threw himself at her feet, and entreated her to believe he was deeply sensible of her goodness, although it did not appear to give him all the satisfaction she wished. “It has penetrated my heart,” continued he; “but the more I feel your kindness, the more I think myself unworthy of it. You wish your gifts, I know, to be always the reward of merit; and how can I avail myself of your generosity, when I am conscious I have no claim to your consideration?”

“My dear Frederick,” replied Mrs. Al-

morne, “hear what I have to say; I shall obviate all your scruples, and reconcile you to yourself. You have been imprudent, but never unworthy; and your errors are past. The cause of your present distress does you honour. I know your generous conduct to your friend, and am happy it is in my power to prevent your suffering from it. He is a worthy man, and the father of a family; in serving him I shall feel the truest pleasure.—Accept then my offer for his sake, if not for your own,—but if you are still scrupulous—if you will not owe to me a kindness, consider that I would do infinitely more to save your parents, and Constantia, the misery of losing you.”

“How powerful is goodness!” exclaimed Frederick, while the agitation he was under, rendered him almost incapable of articulation; “may I be enabled to imitate your excellence, and thus show my gratitude.”

“My dear friend,” said Mrs. Almorne, “you must oblige me by governing your feelings,—I cannot support them. I am less firm

than you suppose, and you would not wish to distress me."

"Permit me only to say——"

"No," interrupted Mrs. Almorne; "I cannot permit another word upon the subject,—let it rest for ever in the breast of you and Constantia; and grant me the pleasure of seeing you pass this evening happily with your father and mother."

Frederick forebore to reply, but his silence was not less expressive than words.

CHAPTER II.

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THOUGH at the moment of Mrs. Almorne's gift to Frederick, Constantia felt only gratitude and joy, yet she soon became uneasy, lest the largeness of the sum might expose Mrs. Almorne to inconvenience; and took the first opportunity, after the departure of her brother, to express to her the fears she suffered on that account.

“Mrs. Almorne requested her to banish her apprehensions, as she should not feel the want of the money, her income being more than sufficient for all her demands.

“That it is more than sufficient for your personal expenses,” replied Constantia, “I

cannot have a doubt, as they form evidently a very small part of your expenditure; but you may have had benevolent purposes in view, which will now be prevented."

"There can be none," rejoined Mrs. Almorne, "which I could think more useful, or feel more agreeable; but I have really no object in view that will suffer interruption."

"How is it, my dear Madam, that you contrive to do so much with your money? I see many with much greater incomes than yours, who are always in difficulties; yet you, though your generosity is unbounded, seem to give, as if you had a secret mine always ready to supply you with new treasure."

"There are various causes for this, some of which I shall explain, as they may afford instruction for the regulation of your own expenses through life.

In comparing my fortune with that of others, you should compare also our situations. I have no family; no friends, or relations, who are dependent upon me, and few personal ex-

penses. I do not game; give no splendid entertainments; have no house in town; dress plain; am contented with one carriage, and few servants,—and have in fine, few of the expenses which so generally distinguish the rich. My income is, therefore, to me more than double, perhaps ten times the value it would be to many others: but there are less obvious causes of my wealth, which I particularly recommend to your consideration.

The first is my being in a great measure my own steward; and where I require assistance, I employ persons on whose understanding and fidelity I have strong reason to rely; taking care, however, to examine most particularly into their conduct; for want of judgment or honesty are not the only evils we have to dread in agents. Indolence, or too great a variety of concerns, often prevents men from executing the trust they undertake; and the spirit of procrastination is so marked a trait in the character of attorneys, that there is scarcely one of them, who is not infected by it, although it often leads to the ruin of the affairs intrusted to their care. I could name men of
| very high rank, and great property, whose

affairs are transacted at once in the *meanest* and most *expensive* manner, though their agents have the *reputation* of being men of worth and understanding.

The mismanagement arising from Stewards of inferior character is too notorious to be spoken of; but vast sums are thus annually lost to the gentlemen of landed property in England. Were the generality of men of fortune to pay but a very little more attention to the conduct of their agents than they commonly do, they would not only save a great deal of money, but would prevent a train of abuses, which distresses their tenantry, and injure the morals of the lower classes; for the example of waste, dishonesty, and tyranny, which peasants often see in Land-Stewards, has the worst effect on their own conduct.

By rendering it easy for the meanest person on my estate, to apply to myself, I have avoided much imposition; and no one now pretends to neglect my concerns, because it is well known I will have business done.

An easier means of economy is preventing the extravagance of servants. Even persons of moderate fortune, often allow their servants

to waste more in a week, than would support several poor families for a month. This does not proceed from liberality, but from habits of profusion, or want of proper attention to domestic affairs. Great, or fine ladies, are not to be expected to attend to domestic concerns ; but if they do not, they must submit to sacrifice much money, without benefit to themselves or others.

They are, likewise, apt to squander money in presents to servants, though they have no regard for them, but give from habit, or the wish to appear generous. I have seen ladies thus generous, who had friends and relations in want of decent apparel, that would have been truly grateful for presents, which their servants received as things of course, that laid them under no obligation.

Another superfluous expense to people of fortune, is giving money merely because it is expected from them. Much is lost in this way. You will often hear people say, we must give, because it is expected of us ; it would appear mean to do otherwise. For the same reason we must dress in a certain style ; entertain in a certain way, and do a thousand

other things, whether it suits us or not, for the demands on people of fortune are innumerable. I expend no money on this principle. My expenses are regulated by my judgment, with very little regard to appearances. There ought undoubtedly to be a certain conformity between expense and station; but this falls infinitely short of the thoughtless expenditure which many practice, from not understanding the proper means of obtaining respectability.

I take care, likewise, never to give more for any thing than the regulated price; if I think it too little, I compensate in other ways. The inconsiderate profusion of persons, who often regulate their payments by their fancy, is a public injury, by enhancing the price of commodities, engendering greediness, encouraging extortion, and exposing poor people, who can hardly give the just prices, to be treated with insolence and neglect.

An important part of my economy is the paying ready money for every thing I purchase. I thus get things better, and cheaper, than the poor can afford, or the rich generally choose to do.

You will be surprised to know, that liberal as you think me, I have been at little expense for public subscriptions, or charitable institutions. My name has seldom appeared in the list of the first, because I have disapproved of many of them ; and I dare to refuse whatever I think improper ; and I have not given largely to a number of the latter, because I knew they were liable to great abuses, and will always have a numerous class of supporters.

Charitable donations are extremely common, though the motives of them are various. Some give from real compassion,—others from a sense of duty ; many from the fear of censure, and not a few from vanity, or self-interested motives.

It is not, therefore, by public charities, that I have attained the reputation I possess for benevolence, nor could I thus have obtained it ; for charity, as I have already said, is common. Neither is bounty to relations or favourites, rare,—but liberality to strangers, merely from compassion for misfortune, or regard to merit, is seldom practised ; and, therefore, when it does take place, excites more ob-

servation. Thus, many of the persons to whom I have rendered services, so little expected them, that they over-rated the obligation, and extolled my benevolence infinitely more than it deserved."

"Was it possible to do so? Can any thing be more deserving of praise than disinterested benevolence? Than——"

"Stop, my dear, and reflect before you proceed. I wish you to respect my principles, but not to fancy my merit greater than it is. In my situation it is so easy to do what will be termed generous, that I have been much praised for acts, which cost me so little, that I was ashamed to receive acknowledgments for them.

Nor has this exaggerated praise arisen solely from pecuniary gifts. It is not always, Constantia, by great pecuniary favours, that we oblige people the most; and this is a circumstance which I wish you particularly to consider. Examine the situation of individuals, and you will be surprised to find how easy it often is to oblige them materially.

A few well-timed attentions, will give consolation to the drooping heart ; the sacrifice of a little time procures them important benefits ;— a few pounds, critically employed, will sometimes preserve a family in prosperity, and a few shillings save a human being from want.

When I consider the numerous class of rich people, which this kingdom contained before the present war, I am grieved to think how few have been distinguished by generosity. There are, indeed, some individuals whose conduct is angelic ; but how very seldom are the epithets benevolent or generous, attached to the names of the rich or great !”

“ Is this owing chiefly to cold-hearted selfishness ?”

“ With too many it is ; but I am persuaded that it is often the effect of ignorance, or want of reflection. There are many LadyTownlys, who, on refusing to pay a tradesman’s bill, would be completely shocked at their own conduct, if they could follow him home, and see the misery it occasions to his wife and children.

Often has your father said, if we would but think of ourselves a little less, and of others, a very little more than we do, it would be easy to make mankind much happier than they are. It is this humane consideration of others, which renders him the idol of so many people ; and it is the same disposition in you, which has attached me to you so particularly."

"Would to heaven, I could resemble him !"

"In seeking, my love, to promote the happiness of others, you will often find consideration more necessary than money ; but in whatever way you wish to serve them, let me earnestly recommend to you, to be your own agent. Whether it is a great or small benefit you mean to confer, do it yourself as far as it is in your power. Leave *nothing* to servants, and as little as possible to others.— On every occasion of your life, remember, 'If you would have your business done, *go* ; if not, *send*.'"

CHAPTER III.

THE situation of Frederick had so strongly interested the feelings of Constantia, that, while he remained at the Abbey, she was entirely forgetful of herself; and after his departure, gratitude for the unexpected relief he had obtained, though it could not elevate her spirits, in some measure tempered her unhappiness. She now discovered, that it was possible to experience transports of joy, when the heart was loaded with sorrow; and that, in very painful states, partial relief was capable of producing temporary happiness.

But her anxiety about Valmonsor, though it could be suspended, could not be diminished; whenever she thought of him, it was with increasing concern; for his absence appeared every hour more inexplicable and alarming.

Mrs. Almorne endeavoured to persuade her, that it must be owing to some temporary embarrassment, or misapprehension respecting her conduct, which would soon be removed ; but these suggestions afforded her no consolation. She could not imagine that any embarrassment, which could induce him to act so strangely, was likely to prove temporary ; still less could she suppose, that his conduct was owing to any mistake respecting her, as she had not given the smallest occasion for any. But were it otherwise, she could not think absence the natural consequence of displeasure ; for it was only by their meeting that he could expect to remove or confirm any doubts he might entertain with regard to her, which, from the general uniformity of her behaviour to him, could not be of so serious a nature as to justify his deserting her entirely. So far, however, had she been from giving him offence, that she had encouraged him to a degree, of which the idea would be insupportable, if she could have the slightest suspicion that he was unworthy of her regard.

It was certainly possible, that she might be

mistaken in his character, but she could not be so in his understanding ; and much less good sense than he possessed, was sufficient to teach him the extraordinary impropriety of his conduct.

She was extremely anxious to know if Harriet Hargrave had any intercourse with him ; but, as she wished to avoid meeting with her, instead of going to Oak Hill, she endeavoured to obtain the desired information, by bringing Louisa to Ornaville. This, however, it was not easy to effect. Louisa had only been once at the Abbey since Constantia had dined at Oak Hill ; and, to the invitations she received from her, she replied by requesting to be excused from an immediate compliance, as she was engaged with family parties which she mentioned, but hoped to spend a day with her soon, and in the mean while would be at pains to obtain all the information she could about Valmonsor.

These answers did not excite any suspicion in Constantia, who knew, that the parties which Louisa mentioned could not easily be

avoided; and as she supposed she had nothing to communicate about Valmonsor, she thought it very probable she might wish to delay coming to the Abbey, till she could gain some intelligence of him.

But this was far from being the sole cause of Louisa's absence. It was not her ignorance, but her knowledge of Valmonsor, that deterred her from seeing Constantia; for she knew that he had such frequent meetings with Harriet at Ramsgate, as could hardly be supposed accidental on the part of either.

Harriet had been long in the practice of having letters left for her at B——'s, that she might have a pretext for calling there as often as she was in Ramsgate. At his library she was pretty certain of passing a little time agreeably, in meeting with acquaintance or strangers; and even when there was no one there, she generally spent an hour in looking at newspapers, or pamphlets. Valmonsor knew it was her custom to do so; and he never failed to be at B——'s as often as she was there, which happened very frequently.

Of this Louisa was informed by Harriet, and likewise by Prudence and Tresilian, who had seen him repeatedly at B——'s when they accompanied Harriet thither.

This intelligence filled her with terror for the happiness of her friend. She did not suppose Valmonsor could neglect Constantia so unaccountably, and throw himself constantly in the way of Harriet, without feeling a change in his affections, or at least some desire to change; and the latter, when such a woman as Harriet was in play, was almost as much to be dreaded as the former. She could not feel the confidence in his character which Constantia did; and though she had no doubt of his having entertained affection for her, she knew not if it had attained much strength, or if he was of so steady a nature as to be proof against the allurements of a woman so uncommonly fascinating as Harriet, who was likewise in circumstances that gave every encouragement to his making his addresses to her, if he felt any partiality in her favour.

If he did so, she was indeed surprised at

his not coming to Oak Hill ; but, on a little reflection, she supposed this might arise partly from his fear of meeting with Constantia, and partly from Harriet's not giving him much encouragement to come, lest his visits should embarrass her with Tresilian, who seldom passed a day without being at Oak Hill.

She knew, however, that it was Harriet's intention to invite him to dinner soon ; and as she hoped she might then be able to discover their real situation with each other, she wished to delay her meeting with Constantia till his visit was over, that she might neither aggravate her unhappiness unnecessarily, by mistaken fears of Harriet, nor encourage her in expectations of him, if there was no longer a probability of their being realized.

While she was thus anxiously waiting for his coming to Oak Hill, Harriet asked her one morning, in a careless way, if she was disposed for a ride ?

Upon Louisa's answering in the negative, she told her, that she was going on a little ex-

cursion towards Tresilian Vale, and wished she would accompany her ; adding, “ I shall not be alone, Louisa, but I hope the pleasure of my company is sufficient to induce you to grant my request.”

Tresilian Vale was the seat of Tresilian ; and the mention of it was at once decisive in preventing Louisa’s being of the party : she had no doubt the excursion was planned in concert with him, and she again declined it, privately congratulating herself that she had done so before his seat had been mentioned.

Her satisfaction was, however, of short duration ; for an hour after Valmonsor arrived, and with sorrow she discovered, that he was the person who was to attend Harriet on her excursion.

He expressed regret on seeing, by Louisa’s dress, that she was not to accompany them ; and she was so much vexed at missing such an opportunity of being with him and Harriet, that she was on the point of desiring them to

wait till she could change her apparel, when she was prevented, by Harriet's saying, " I have solicited Louisa in vain to take a ride ; and as Prudence is from home, we must submit to go without either.

This speech disconcerted Louisa ; and while she hesitated a moment what she ought to do, Harriet rose, and said she wished to set off before the morning advanced.

Valmonsor instantly rose, and Louisa had scarcely time to say a few words, expressive of her regret for not accompanying them, before he was hurried away.

Harriet had engaged Valmonsor on this excursion, on pretext of showing him a beautiful part of the country he had not seen ; and as it was her earnest wish that her sisters might not be with them, she fixed upon a day for it, when she knew that Prudence was to be from home, and hoped, by address, to prevent Louisa's joining them.

Elated with the success of her scheme, she

left Oak Hill, in full expectation of making a favourable impression upon Valmonsor.

From the first day that she had seen him, she had been struck with his conversation and manners; and perceiving he was a man of superior understanding and taste, she felt uncommon solicitude to attract his admiration. The conquest of such a man had charms in it, which were to her irresistibly alluring; and she could hardly feel a higher satisfaction than in seeing him her captive. His frequent meetings with her at B———'s, which were too marked to be attributed to accident, inspired the hope of his being already interested in her; and although she was not without fear of Constantia as a rival, she flattered herself, that one or two fortunate interviews would give her such decided influence over him, as would prevent her being in danger from any competitor whatever.

The nets she spread for her captives, were of various texture. With some, she trusted entirely to the charms of her person, which she skilfully adorned, and displayed to the

highest advantage; with others, kindness was the sole art by which she enslaved them; and from many, she was even careful to conceal the talents she possessed, lest they should feel a painful consciousness of inferiority:—but with Valmonsor, she pursued a very different course. Her personal beauties she left to himself to discover, certain that his taste could not fail to do them justice, while they might be rendered more pleasing, by her appearing regardless of them herself: kindness she did not venture to show, lest it might alarm him; but while she treated him with an attention at once flattering and easy, she rested her chief hopes of pleasing him, on rendering her conversation and manners engaging. Could she once bring him to listen to her with pleasure, the inclination he already showed to be with her, would quickly increase; and, in proportion as the satisfaction he found in her society appeared to augment, she could vary her modes of captivation at pleasure, till her triumph was complete.

With these views, it was of consequence

to have meetings with him alone, that she might guide the conversation as she pleased, without interruption or restraint. She had now happily accomplished a meeting, which promised the highest success; there was no third person to impede her designs; and the country, through which she was to pass, exhibited a variety of scenery that admitted the utmost scope for the excursions of fancy, and display of taste. Her imagination could glow with the rich and highly cultivated landscape before her; while with no less ease, she could accommodate herself to those ideas, which the more simple beauties of nature were suited to inspire. The poet and painter, lent their aid to embellish her conversation; and the various seats appearing in view, afforded entertaining historical anecdotes, to vary the style of it. Most happily could she adapt herself to circumstances of time and place; never touching farther on a subject than she saw was agreeable, unless she had some particular design in view; and guarding equally from frivolous observation, and keen dispute.

The place she had mentioned to Valmonsor, as the principal object of their ride, did not extend it so far as she wished; and she proposed, on their return, to protract it, by visiting a cottage about half a mile off the road, which she told him was an object of curiosity, not only from the singular beauty of the spot, but the strikingly simple, and amiable manners of its inhabitants.

Valmonsor made no objection to the proposal, and she conducted him through fields, which, in a few minutes, brought them to the place, where they alighted, and leaving their horses to the care of her servant, entered the cottage.

Martha Blifs, (the tenant of it,) received them with the most cordial simplicity, and Harriet returned her address with engaging affability. She inquired after her husband and family; and put a number of questions, which she had previously told Valmonsor, would display to him the condition of an amiable and happy rustic.

Martha requested her guests to accept of the little refreshment her cottage afforded; and Harriet desired her to bring them a little brown bread and milk.

While the repast was preparing, Harriet asked Valmonsor how he was pleased with the scene?

“Highly,” answered he; “the situation is beautiful; the house and furniture superlatively neat and clean; and the ruddy family around, inspire the idea of peace and content.”

“This is just the place,” replied Harriet, “which the imagination paints, when we talk of rural felicity; here, if any where, may be found,

“Lovely, lasting peace of mind.”

“If any where,” repeated Valmonsor, with a sigh.

“Can any thing,” rejoined Harriet, “be more delightful than this scene! However the vanities of life may attract us for a mo-

ment, there are no true pleasures in the bustle of the world."

"A care-worn soldier," replied Valmonsor, "might prize the tranquillity of this spot; but how can the happy inhabitant of Oak Hill, think it desirable?"

"The inhabitants of Oak Hill," returned Harriet, "are removed from the bustle, but not from the follies of life. They must see, and associate with the trifling sons and daughters of Fashion, who come in their way; not one of whom, perhaps, can have an idea of the charms of this abode. We must always accommodate ourselves, in some degree, to those we associate with; and thus be often carried by the stream against our inclination. How many foolish sacrifices are made to the spirit of accommodation!"

Valmonsor answered only by a sigh.

After a short pause, Harriet turned to Martha, and asked when she had seen Miss Ornvile?

"Not since she was at Elbourne, in

May," answered Martha; "she used to ride often this way, but now she never comes at all."

"She is much engaged at home, I suppose," said Harriet; I fancy she will very soon be married."

"Married!" repeated Martha, "dearee me, ma'am, who is she to be married to?"

"To Lord Woodford," replied Harriet; but as it is not certain, Martha, you had better say nothing of it till you hear farther."

"Her marriage then is only reported?" said Valmonsor.

"I know not if it even is reported," answered Harriet; "I have been rather inconsiderate in what I have said; but my Lord's attachment to Miss Ornvile, is so very well known, that their marriage may certainly be expected. He returned lately to his house, in this neighbourhood, after an absence, which I suppose was unavoidable; and it is very probable that he is now making his ad-

dresses to her. I can have little doubt of it; and it is not likely she will refuse him."

"She is then partial to him?" said Valmonsor.

"A woman must not," replied Harriet, with a smile, "be supposed to have any partiality for a man, till he has declared himself her lover: Affection is, indeed, very frequently the consequence of that event; for the acquaintance and the lover are very different persons. At a distance, Miss Ornvile may think of Lord Woodford with indifference; but when he assumes the character of the lover, she may see him in a different light; he has many qualities to recommend him, and the wealth necessary for her."

"Necessary!" repeated Valmonsor; "I did not suppose Miss Ornvile was ambitious of wealth?"

"She is far from it; no person can value it less. It is, nevertheless, necessary for her.

A woman, who has been all her life accustomed to the luxuries of life, and the most tender indulgence from friends, must be extremely unfit to encounter any hardship. Miss Ornaville is a charming woman, and so superior to vanity, that I dare say she is persuaded she could be happy in a cottage; but with her habits, don't you think such notions must be imaginary?"

"They may."

"Her friends must be well aware how important wealth is to her; and will endeavour to promote her marriage with Woodford. Sir John does not give his daughters independent fortunes: Lady Horn-don got only five thousand pounds; which, to Miss Ornaville, is nothing."

"But if her family treat her with the indulgence you speak of, they will not think of inducing her to marry against her inclination."

"Her father certainly never would; but her eldest brother as certainly will. I am sorry to say, that he is a very vain, lux-

urious, selfish man; and though she will be little influenced by his opinions, he may, notwithstanding, decide her fate. He governs his mother, whom he will employ as a tool with his sister; and on Miss Ornvile, I believe the solicitations of a parent, will have the effect of commands. Lord Woodford's is a connection which Ornvile must extremely desire; and will therefore leave no means unattempted to effect."

"Will the connection be as agreeable to her father, as her brother?"

"He would undoubtedly be pleased with it; he cannot have an objection to Woodford: and among his numerous recommendations, he will consider with peculiar satisfaction, that his chief seat is in the neighbourhood of Ornvile. It would break Sir John's heart to part with his daughter, who is justly the object of his tenderest affection, and the greatest source of his happiness. So many circumstances in favour of Lord Woodford, render it highly probable that his marriage with Miss Ornvile is at this very moment en train."

Harriet paused some time for an answer; but perceiving Valmonsor not inclined to give any, she proposed departing; to which he instantly agreed, and they left the cottage, after suitable acknowledgments to Martha for her hospitality.

While Harriet had thus freely communicated her sentiments of the Ornvile family, she little suspected that every syllable she had uttered, had been overheard by Lady Horndon. The cottage was not half a mile from Elbourne, where Martha had been before her marriage, a valued servant, and she still preserved the favour of Lady Horndon. One of Martha's children having been hurt by a fall, Lady Horndon had called at the cottage, to inquire after it, a few minutes before the arrival of Harriet and Valmonsor; and seeing from the window their approach, had instantly felt a wish to avoid them. Her domestic life, made her generally averse to meet with strangers; and the sight of Harriet Hargrave, whom she did not like, lessened not her reluctance to it at present. She immediately withdrew to a small inner apart-

ment, desiring Martha to say nothing of her being there, as the gentleman was a stranger to her, and she did not wish to detain Miss Hargrave, who, she supposed, would stay but a few minutes.

The room she retired to, was separated from the other, only by a thin partition, in which there were several crevices, so that it was impossible not to hear distinctly all that passed; and she did not apprehend, till it was too late to discover herself, that any thing could be said, which it might be improper for her to hear.

Although Harriet had said nothing that she might not be supposed to think, Lady Horn-don was vexed, and surprised at her speaking so freely of her family, to a stranger; and regretted particularly what she had said of Lord Woodford, as it might give rise to reports, which ought not to come from any of Miss Ornvill's relations. She determined, therefore, to acquaint Louisa with what she had overheard; and to request she would, if possible, prevent the stranger from making

an imprudent use of the information he had received.

The moment she got home, she wrote a note to Louisa, begging to see her at Elbourne, as soon as she conveniently could; and this note, she instantly dispatched to Oak Hill.

CHAPTER IV.

LOUISA got Lady Horndon's note soon after Harriet returned from her excursion. She had hoped to see Valmonsor with her, and that he would dine at Oak Hill; but he took leave at the door; and thus Louisa was again disappointed of seeing them together.

As soon as Harriet arrived, she sat down to write an answer to a letter she found waiting for her; which put it out of Louisa's power to make any inquiries about Valmonsor; and Lady Horndon's note arriving before Harriet had ceased writing, Louisa set out for Elbourne, without being able to conjecture from her behaviour, whether she had been gratified, or disappointed by the excursion.

From Lady Horndon, she received a minute relation of the conversation she had overheard at the cottage, which did not exhilarate her spirits. The fears it had excited in the mind of Lady Horndon, she could easily suppress; but her own she could not allay.

It was some comfort to perceive from the impressions Harriet had been at pains to give Valmonsor, that she yet dreaded Constantia as a rival, and thought it necessary to discourage his thinking of her, by the most artful insinuations; but still she feared fatal effects from these insinuations. They were calculated to destroy entirely, the impressions which Mrs. Almorne had been solicitous he should receive, and which had been attended with beneficial effects; and whatever might be the cause of his late extraordinary behaviour, it was now probable he would avoid Constantia more carefully than ever; and that, by one means or other, Harriet would at length effectually succeed in depriving her of him.

Louisa did not return to Oak Hill till the evening; when, to her extreme vexation, she saw Harriet's appearance and manner expressive of the utmost satisfaction. Doubtful, however, whether to attribute this to the behaviour of Valmonsor, or to the hopes she might entertain from the impressions she had given him, she resolved to try if she could discern by a little conversation, her situation with him.

She began by asking if she had spent the morning agreeably?

"Very agreeably," replied Harriet; "the day was fine; and Valmonsor, whether gay or grave, is always entertaining."

"Was he gay, or grave, to-day?"

"Neither, I believe; the subjects to which the scenes before us led, were not of a mirthful cast."

"I have seen Valmonsor so seldom, that I cannot well form an opinion of him; but from

his countenance this morning, I should have said he was melancholy."

"You must not judge of Valmonsor by his appearance; he is a man of so much sensibility, that his spirits are variable; but his agreeableness is uniform: he is always intelligent, eloquent, and pleasing."

"You are fortunate then, in meeting with him so often: he is a very pretty amusement for you, at Ramsgate."

"He is something more than an amusement,—which I have to be sure, whenever I am there."

"Are you so very certain of meeting him?"

"He makes it pretty certain by being constantly at B——'s, at the time I usually make my appearance. He seldom, indeed, leaves me, without asking when I am to return; and I find he is never there in weather which does not permit me to come."

"You are then necessary to his amusement?"

“ I leave you to draw your own conclusions, Louisa: I state facts, but do not venture into the region of conjecture.”

“ You may, at least, conjecture how he liked you to-day :—Was he pleased with his excursion ?”

“ Highly, I presume; for he is an enthusiastic admirer of fine landscapes, and still more of the bewitchingly simple beauties of nature; I therefore carried him on our return, to visit Martha Blifs.”

“ Of whose rural felicity, you would, no doubt, talk to him with rapture !”

“ Why that look of mingled disapprobation, and surprise, Louisa ?”

“ Because you can expatiate to him on the charms of a cottage, with the same ease that you descant to Mrs. Fancourt, on the pleasures of the Metropolis.”

“ And is there any harm in that? May I not understand the advantages of both ?”

“What would he think, if he heard you conversing with her?”

“That I had taste for various enjoyments ; or, at worst, that I indulged her foibles.”

“But is there no deception in all this ? Must not the one or the other be mistaken in you ?”

“Neither : for I am really sincere with both. Mrs. Fancourt’s gaiety enlivens me, and I willingly partake of her amusements ; Valmonsor’s eloquence charms me ; and when I hear him expatiate on the tranquil pleasures of life, I am inspired by his sentiments, and become an admirer both of him, and them.”

“I have often thought, Harriet, that you had two souls.”

“I have : at least one that answers a great many purposes.”

“Would to heaven, you may fall into good hands ; your fate will depend upon it.”

“Yet you often tell me, that I am not sufficiently accommodating.”

“ You never are, when your passions are not interested ; you do not yield to reason, or a sense of duty, but give up both your opinions and conduct to those who have the power of exciting your admiration, or touching your feelings.”

“ There is some truth in the observation, Louisa ; but happily no one knows it but yourself.”

Louisa did not pursue the conversation farther.—She was too much hurt with what Harriet had said of Valmonsor, to have spirit to proceed. She feared he was on the point of falling irrecoverably into her power ; and though he could not be so without being unworthy of her friend, this reflection offered small consolation, since Constantia must still suffer severely from the disappointment.

Most ardently she wished, that if Constantia must lose him, it might be by any other means ; so very painful did she feel the loss of a beloved object, by the transfer of their affection to an unworthy rival. The only re-

lief she found to her anxiety, was in the thoughts of communicating to Mrs. Almorne the information she had received from Lady Horndon. From her opinion she might possibly derive some consolation; at all events she would instruct her how she ought to conduct herself with regard to Constantia; and she, therefore, determined to visit her early in the morning.

In the service of her friend she had no hesitation in speaking freely of her sister to Mrs. Almorne, who she knew was no stranger to her character. Constantia excepted, Mrs. Almorne was the only person who was thoroughly acquainted with the characters of the Hargrave family. Her own discernment, aided by information from Constantia, had fully developed them, although she had little intercourse with any of the family. She loved and esteemed Louisa, but as she saw that she was not much liked by Prudence, and not a little dreaded by Harriet, she had entered into a tacit agreement with them, to meet as seldom as they could, without appearing to dislike each other.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE breakfast next morning, Louisa went to Delvin-Lodge. She found Mrs. Almorne alone, and gave her a particular account of every thing she knew respecting Harriet's intercourse with Valmonsor, concluding her recital by expressing the strong apprehensions she was under.

Mrs. Almorne's answer immediately alleviated, in some degree, her fears. She told her she was very far from imagining that Valmonsor had become indifferent about Constantia, as she was convinced he had lately entertained an affection for her, which could not be so quickly overcome.

"How then," said Louisa, "do you ac-

count for his neglect of her, and attention to Harriet ?”

“ It is not very easy, replied Mrs. Almorne ;
“ but his behaviour to your friend, is too odd to be attributed either to indifference, or prudential considerations. We must seek the cause of it in his having either fallen into some mistake respecting her behaviour, or received some mis-information. The first is always easy to a lover ; the latter we are exposed to in every situation. His attention to Harriet may proceed merely from the love of amusement, for she is extremely agreeable ; and her being Constantia’s friend, may even be a principal cause of the satisfaction he finds in her society.”

“ A dangerous satisfaction,” said Louisa :
“ his mistakes when fostered by the suggestion of such a syren, may deprive Constantia of him for ever ; though, if he is the character we have imagined, his affection will be steady.”

“ He may, however, marry Harriet without ceasing to regard Constantia ; his very affec-

tion for your friend may precipitate him into the power of your sister. Her kindness may console ; her attentions flatter ; and her fortune encourage him to imagine the only solace he can find for the loss of Constantia, is the marrying Harriet. Many marriages arise from disappointment."

" But Harriet will not marry him ; she may be hurried over a precipice through passion, but will not easily be led into a cottage by affection. Nor is Valmonsor the man for whom she would sacrifice. As a lover she would be charmed with him,—as a husband she would dread him : her character could not bear the inspection of such a mind as his. I doubt if even high rank and fortune, could induce her to accommodate herself to his sentiments in practice, however well she may do it in theory."

" I believe, indeed, there is no danger of her marrying him ; but if she detaches him from Constantia, it will be sufficiently afflicting. If he is once in the power of your sister, he will never return to your friend, nor ought she

to receive him, if he did. I admire, while I deplore, the address of Harriet. She sees that she has a powerful enemy to contend with in Constantia, whom she is resolved to vanquish by art, if she cannot overcome by force; and so judicious are the means she employs, that they cannot injure herself, though they should not weaken her adversary."

"This is always her mode of attack; she manages her schemes with such skill, that they seldom recoil upon herself."

"It must be our care to prevent their injuring Constantia. Valmonsor must not be lost to her, either by artifice or mistake."

"But how can it be prevented?"

"By you. I doubt if his meeting now with Constantia, could be attended with any advantage; for he may be so confirmed in error, as to avoid conversation with her, and she is too much displeased, as well as too unhappy, to treat him in the manner that might favour an explanation. It is from you, therefore, that I expect the termination of their

embarrassments. You must endeavour to meet with him, and inquire the cause of his absence from Ornaville. If his answer is not repulsive, you will tell him, that his friends there have greatly regretted his absence, and from his reply, you will perceive how far you may go, in obliging him to explain his behaviour: but I would not have you scrupulous in bringing him to an eclaireissement. I am not afraid of your committing your friend improperly; and after all that has passed between them, I should dread far more the leaving him to be misled by your sister, than your speaking to him freely. If his conduct has arisen from any misapprehension, a few words will be sufficient to correct it:—if it has not, the fault must lie in himself, which it is time Constantia should know.”

“I begin to perceive how my meeting with him may be of service; but how to accomplish it is the next difficulty.”

“You must try to meet with him at Ramsgate, as Harriet does, and if you do not succeed, you will certainly see him soon at Oak

Hill ; where even the presence of your sisters must not prevent your design. Constantia must not be destroyed by a state of agonizing suspense."

" I shall do every thing you desire to the utmost of my power, and shall not cease my endeavours to meet with Valmonsor, until they are successful. This very morning I shall go to Ramsgate ; for I have yet time to pass an hour or two there, and I would not lose an instant in the attainment of our object."

" On your endeavours I build the most flattering hopes ; for if Valmonsor is only actuated by a mistake, he will gladly afford you an opportunity of speaking to him, as he knows you to be the chosen friend of Constantia."

CHAPTER VI.



WHEN Louisa got to Ramsgate, she went directly to B——'s, where she thought she had the best chance of seeing Valmonsor. He was not there; but as the hour was not passed, when he might expect to meet Harriet, she resolved to wait, and after asking for some books, sat down with a newspaper in her hand, to give her a pretext for remaining.

While she was skimming it over in a careless way, her attention was very disagreeably called from it, by the entrance of Harriet and Tresilian.

“What!” cried the latter, advancing with a gay air, “Miss Louisa turned politician!”

“There are more subjects of speculation in the newspapers than politics,” answered Louisa; “here is an account of a grand fête given by the Countess of Motely.”

“Yes,” replied Tresilian, glancing his eye over the paper; “and just below it is an account of a family starving:—How entertaining this is!”

“Entertaining!”

“Yes, it shows you how the world goes. is it not an excellent dessert to her Ladyship’s feast?”

“It is a dessert,” returned Louisa, “which has long disgusted me with newspapers. I have no relish for an account of fêtes, where the choicest delicacies of the season are lavished with profusion to select parties, when in the same column I read heart-rending descriptions of poverty and wretchedness.”

“Louisa,” said Harriet, “you will always view the world as a tragedy.”

“What do you think of the world, Mrs.

Fancourt?" cried Tresilian, to a gay, pretty looking woman, who came into the library:—"is it tragic, or comic?"

"It is quite a farce," exclaimed Mrs. Fancourt;—"don't you think so, Tresilian?"

TRESILIAN. "Certainly; its absurdities are so innumerable, that whether the scene before us is gay or grave, the whole is undoubtedly a farce.

MRS. FANCOURT. "I protest I see nothing absurd in it: the world has always been to me a very delightful place."

TRESILIAN. "But you have heard of such a thing as sorrow. Miss Louisa was just now shocked by reading in the newspaper of a family in deplorable want."

MRS. FANCOURT. "Lord! why does she read such things? I give a great deal of money to the poor; but I should become an object of charity myself, were I to think of them farther."

TRESILIAN. "There would be an end of the world as delightful if you did."

HARRIET. “O, Heaven! better an end of it every way. Who, pray, could enjoy a single comfort, if they were to postpone their hour of happiness, till the calamities of mankind should cease?”

TRESILIAN. “I wish, Mrs. Fancourt, you would take Miss Louisa under your tuition; she has strange unfashionable notions. I am positively afraid of her eloping one of these days to his Grace of N d, from his being distinguished as the giver of grand fêtes and donations to the poor.”

HARRIET. “She is no less in danger of an elopement to the Institutors of the London Philanthropic Society;—their benevolence has excited her admiration to a degree, that threatens to have the most serious effects——on her character through life.”

MRS. FANCOURT. “My dear Louisa, you should really pass your winters in town. There you would be hurried so delightfully from one enchanting scene to another, that you would have no time to discover whether you had a heart or not.—But you must get

into the right circle; your improvement will greatly depend upon that."

TRESILIAN. "The necessary improvements are——?"

MRS. FANCOURT. "Indefinable.—Above all, Louisa, 'tis a thousand pities, you do not know the pleasure of being silly,—it relieves one so delightfully!"

HARRIET. "The very charm of life is the art of trifling agreeably."

MRS. FANCOURT. "I intend soon, Harriet, to try your talents for amusement, by giving a masquerade. What character should I assume?"

TRESILIAN. "If you assume any, you will never be known."

MRS. FANCOURT. "How gratifying a discovery!"

TRESILIAN. "Pardon me, I only mean there is such charming variety in your composition, that no body could suspect you of the dull sameness of a character."

MRS. FANCOURT. " You think,

" Woman and Fool are two hard things to hit ;

" For true no meaning, puzzles more than wit."

HARRIET. " I wish I could borrow men's eyes for a week, that I might know how they view us."

TRESILIAN. " Would you expect to discover charms in yourself, that you have never imagined ?"

HARRIET. " And how many blemishes?"

TRESILIAN. " Will you assist me in making the calculation?"

HARRIET. " I shall not even attempt it. I know no means of penetrating the veil thrown over us by self-love."

TRESILIAN. " Still less can an admirer do it ; notwithstanding the blindness of love has been the theme of ages, the weakness of mankind is fortunately such, that no one is yet found to suspect he can be mistaken in the character of a beloved object."

MRS. FANCOURT. " Harriet, you may

safely trust a female friend's opinion of you ; and I do really think you the most tolerable woman I know."

HARRIET. " Yes, for I

" Can even hold my tongue a minute,

" Tho' all I say, has something in it."

MRS. FANCOURT. " Don't you find the company of most women vastly insipid?"

HARRIET. " Nothing can be so bad, except men who are deaf, dumb, and blind ;—but here comes Captain Valmonsor, who has none of these defects."

" Of what defects do you acquit me?" said Valmonsor, who just then entered.

" I am going, Sir," said Mrs. Fancourt, " to put your qualities to the test by a masquerade ; what character will you choose to display them in?"

VALMONSOR. " Have you any objection to a priest?"

MRS. FANCOURT. " A priest! which of his offices are you so fond of?"

VALMONSOR. "I wish some fair votaries would confess their sins to me; I have great curiosity to look into the hearts of women."

As Valmonsor said this, he fixed his eyes intently upon Louisa.

TRESILIAN. "I have long had the same curiosity; for they are so perplexing, that I suspect many of them always appear in masquerade."

HARRIET. "We have so happy a versatility of disposition, that, perhaps, we perplex the most when we counterfeit the least."

VALMONSOR. "Will you tell me, Miss Hargrave, how we may know the real from the assumed appearance? Is there any way by which a man can be certain of not being mistaken in a female character?"

MRS. FANCOURT. "None, Sir; Mr. Tresilian knows we are composed of such heterogeneous particles, that we can have no consistency of conduct."

While this speech drew a gay answer from

Tresilian, Valmonsor advanced to Louisa, and, in a low voice said, "Inconsistency of character is too frequently to be met with, but it is deplorable when found united with the most admirable qualities."

The countenance and manner of Valmonsor gave a pointed meaning to his words, and Louisa, anxious to seize so favourable an opportunity of speaking to him, eagerly asked, where he had found such inconsistency?

"Where I least wished to find it," answered he.

"Are you certain," replied Louisa, "that you have not been mistaken?"

"Yes," returned he, "I have been mistaken; I trusted in the fairest appearances, and have been cruelly disappointed."

Again was Louisa anxiously going to reply, when Harriet, impatient of her engaging his attention, advanced, and interrupted the conversation by asking if she meant to return home to dinner?"

Being answered in the affirmative, she replied, that she could not accompany her as she was engaged to dine with Mrs. Hanson; and then turning to Valmonsor, began to speak of a copy of verses he had promised her.

A minute after Mrs. Fancourt took leave which put a final end to Louisa's hopes of renewing her conversation with him; for no sooner had Mrs. Fancourt departed in her carriage, which waited at the door, then Harriet addressing Tresilian, said, "As you are going to Mr. Dormer's you will escort Louisa home, and if Captain Valmonsor is not otherwise engaged, he will attend me to Mr. Hanson's."

Valmonsor bowed assent, while Tresilian declared he should be happy to attend Louisa; upon which Harriet wished them a pleasant ride, and departed with Valmonsor.

Louisa was so unhappy in being disappointed of speaking to him, and in seeing him go with Harriet, that she hardly said a word to Tresilian while they walked to the

place where they took their horses; but, after they had left Ramsgate, she expressed a fear lest her slow riding should be disagreeable to him.

“It will be very agreeable,” replied he; “but I am afraid I cannot so easily accommodate myself to your wishes in another particular; I perceive you are so excellent a tragic muse, that you would gladly deprive me of the pleasure of your conversation.”

“I am ashamed of myself,” said Louisa, recollecting how silent she had been; “I grow unfit for society.”

“You have only too much understanding and feeling for the society you often meet with.”

“You are very generous, in thus endeavouring to palliate my failings.”

“If you knew how much I admire what you term your failings, you would see that justice, not generosity, impels me to what I say. I will own, however, that I should wish

the allegro and penseroso more equally blended in you. Your charming sister, Harriet, would——”

At the mention of Harriet's name, Louisa felt her cheeks glow, which Tresilian observing, stopped the sentence he had begun, and said, “ I am afraid my freedom is displeasing.”

“ Far from it—I beg you will proceed; you cannot offend.”

“ Have a care how you trust me. Would to heaven I could restore you to cheerfulness.”

“ Would to heaven!” cried Louisa, emphatically, “ all the world were like you!”

“ Is it possible,” exclaimed Tresilian, “ that you say so!” Dare I trust my senses?”

“ Why should you doubt them?”

“ Because I know, that you never say seriously what you do not sincerely think.”

“ And it is extraordinary I should think thus of you?”

“*Very*; is there an acquaintance I have more indifferent to my society than you?”

These words gave extreme pleasure to Louisa, by showing he had no suspicion of her affection for him; and anxious to convince him, that she was above the littleness of doing injustice to his merit, from his preference of her sister, she eagerly, and energetically replied, “Be assured, Sir, that I can never think any person’s society more estimable than yours.”

“How then,” cried he, “can you pass so many hours in your own apartment when I am at Oak Hill? How often are you even in the same room with me, without attending to a word that I say.”

“You must seek the cause of this in my want of spirits, not in my want of discernment.”

“How ardently do I wish I could restore you to the spirits I once saw you possess!”

“ We must not,” said Louisa, afraid the subject would become embarrassing, “ speak of so insignificant a matter :—give me leave to ask if you are well acquainted with Captain Valmonsor ?”

“ I have dined with him two or three times, and have seen him frequently with your sister, but I am little acquainted with him.”

“ I have heard him so much extolled, that he must be deserving of praise.”

“ He certainly possesses superior qualities, but his spirits seem variable ; he is alternately bright sunshine, or so enveloped in darkness, there is no exploring the way to him. I have lately given him several invitations to Tresilian Vale, only one of which he has accepted, although he does not appear to be much engaged ; for I meet him frequently walking or riding alone, immersed in the deepest gloom.”

“ He is evidently a marked character, and these extremes probably arise from much feeling in difficult circumstances. But we ap-

proach the road to Mr. Dormer's, I shall be glad to release you."

"I am extremely sorry," replied Tresilian, looking at his watch, "that the hour will not permit me to attend you to Oak Hill, and keep my engagement with him; and I am still more concerned, that I cannot have the pleasure of seeing you again for a week or two, being engaged to go to-morrow to a distant part of the county."

"I hope," said Louisa, "you will have an agreeable excursion."

"I flattered myself you were going to hope you would see me as soon as I returned."

"That I shall certainly expect; you have more friends at Oak Hill than I to welcome your return."

"How dextrously you contrive to be civil, without any sacrifice of sincerity! You will not say you will be glad to see me, because you cannot do it truly."

“ Ought I to say that I shall be glad of your company, while I continue so stupid as I have been of late? But this I will say, that there is not a good on earth which I do not most ardently wish you.”

“ Can I hear such language, and think of Dormier? You must permit me to go with you.”

“ You must not,” replied Louisa, smiling, “ carry your gallantry so far ; have I not acknowledged that I cannot wish for your company ?”

“ I believe it, and shall therefore bid you adieu.”

He then took leave, and turned into another road, while she quietly pursued her journey.

The occurrences of this day were extremely gratifying to Louisa. She had long feared that Tresilian either suspected the true cause of her reserved behaviour to him, or might impute it to wounded pride ; she was now relieved from both these apprehensions in the

most agreeable manner, and hoped what she had said would leave her completely at liberty in future to behave to him in any way she found most convenient.

On the behaviour of Valmonsor, she reflected with no less satisfaction, as it convinced her, beyond a doubt, that he was acting under some extraordinary mistake. What it might be, it was impossible to conjecture; but as he seemed as much disposed as herself to enter upon the subject, it would be easy to bring him to an explanation.

She had spoken of him to Tresilian, in the hope of obtaining some information which might possibly throw a light on his character and situation; and in this hope she had not been disappointed. The little Tresilian had said, showed, that whatever might be the cause of Valmonsor's intercourse with Harriet, it contributed little to his happiness; and that it was highly probable his melancholy was owing to his situation with Constantia. A short conversation with himself seemed, therefore, all that was wanting to correct his mistakes, and this, she trusted, she should be able to accomplish.

CHAPTER VII.

ALTHOUGH Louisa entertained sanguine expectations from a conversation with Valmonsor, yet she was not without fear of its being difficult to be obtained. She imagined the fate of Constantia rested, perhaps, entirely on her having an opportunity of removing his mistakes, before long-continued error, and the assiduity of Harriet, should be able to effect any change in his affections; and she, therefore, determined to devote every instant of her time to the attainment of the wished-for conversation.

Her first care in the morning was to go to Delvin Lodge, to give Mrs. Almorne an account of his behaviour at B——'s. It convinced Mrs. Almorne, as it had done Louisa, that

he was actuated by some unaccountable mistake ; and she encouraged her to persevere in her endeavours to obtain a conversation with him by every means in her power. She had little doubt of its being attended with all the consequences they wished ; at least, it would force him to such an explanation of his conduct, as would leave them at no loss what to think of it.

Louisa concurred entirely in Mrs. Almorne's views, and after they had fully discussed the subject, she set out for Ramsgate.

“ On arriving there, she walked wherever she thought there was any probability of meeting Valmonsor, till she went to B——’s, at the hour he was usually there, although she had very little expectation of seeing him, as Harriet was engaged on an excursion, of which she had probably informed him.

After waiting in the library for some time in vain, she renewed her perambulations, and continued them unsuccessfully, till a heavy shower obliged her to take shelter in a shop.

While she waited till the rain should cease, she reflected how often she might fruitlessly pursue the same course, how often the weather might prevent her coming at all from Oak Hill,—and in what an embarrassment it might involve her with her sisters, to come daily without avowing her errand. She saw that she ought to attempt some better mode of accomplishing her object, and thought the best plan would be to pass some days in Ramsgate with Mrs. Hanson, a friend of the family, who was desirous of a visit from her. Her residence at Ramsgate would make it easy to walk there without trouble or observation, at the hours most favourable for her purpose; and if she should fail in meeting with Valmonsor in a walk, she hoped she should be able to effect it by some other means. She had often seen Harriet contrive meetings with various persons, by asking them to execute commissions, or pretending to stand in need of information, which they were particularly qualified to give; and though Louisa's love of truth prevented her entertaining a thought of pursuing the same course, yet it suggested the possibility of adopting some ex-

pedient, which would neither fail of the end she had in view, nor be attended with any impropriety.

Pleased with these views she went directly to Mrs. Hanson, who joyfully received the offer of her visit, and wished it to commence immediately ; but Louisa thought it necessary to return home for a night, both that she might inform her sisters of her intentions, and have the next morning entirely at command. She, therefore, took leave of Mrs. Hanson, with the promise of returning the following day before dinner.

Highly satisfied with this arrangement, she set out for Oak Hill with a tranquillity of mind to which she had long been a stranger, for she flattered herself with the hope of being instrumental to the happiness of her beloved friend ; while the certainty of Tresilian's absence made her feel an ease in returning home, which she had not known since he first visited at Oak Hill.

On her arrival, she found it was considerably past the dinner hour, her visit to Mrs.

Hanson having detained her longer than she would otherwise have remained at Ramsgate.

Miss Hargrave was at dinner alone, when Louisa entered, and very kindly apologised for being so late.

Miss Hargrave returned no answer; she looked extremely grave, and sat very erect without speaking, till dinner was over.

When the servant had withdrawn, she observed in a solemn tone, that she had waited for her, till the dinner was quite spoiled.

“I am extremely sorry,” replied Louisa, “that you waited a moment; I beg you will never do it again.”

“It may be very easy for you to save me the trouble by paying a *little attention* to hours.”

“I may be unexpectedly detained, and you will oblige me by dining always when it is agreeable to yourself, without any regard to me.”

“ It will indeed be very proper, you are not to think of *time*. It may be a matter of indifference to you when you dine, but I choose to do things at *proper* hours,—besides it is very disagreeable to see meat destroyed ; —not that I care what I eat,—nobody in the world can be easier,—but things to-day were so overdone, there was no eating them.”

“ I hope you found something or other tolerable ?”

“ To French or Scotch people they might have been tolerable ; but to the English, who choose to be nourished by their food, they were good for nothing.”

“ I entreat that you will not again wait a minute for me.”

“ It was very strange that you stayed so long with Mrs. Almorne, without dining with her.”

“ I left Mrs. Almorne early, and went to Ramsgate.”

“ To Ramsgate ! What carried you there ?”

“ I had business which I wished to do.”

“ Who did you see? Did you hear any news?”

“ Not a syllable.”

“ You have very probably forgot what you heard.”

“ I saw few of our acquaintance, and they said nothing worth repeating.”

“ You are very fortunate in never hearing any thing worth repeating; Harriet always brings home a budget of news.”

“ Harriet’s cheerfulness leads people to tell her things they do not think of saying to me.”

“ I am as grave as you; but do you ever find me ignorant of what is passing in the world?”

“ You go more from home than I do.”

“ When you do go from home, do you attend to any thing you hear? Did you not

ask Mrs. Brember, if her husband was abroad with the hounds, though you had been told that he had broke his leg in hunting the week before?"

"It was very unlucky forgetfulness; I suffered for it severely."

"Did it amend you?—Two days after, when Mr. Hartley and his daughter dined here, did you not always call her by the name of the man, on whose account her mother had been divorced?"

"That was really not owing to inattention, but to over anxiety; you and Miss Pierce had talked so much of the story the day before, that the fear of committing a mistake, made me constantly blunder."

"If that is the consequence of your attempts to behave well, I think you had better be locked up.—'Tis amazing what you are always thinking of!—I am sure nobody in the world has either less to do, or less to trouble them!"

“ Do you not often say, that Harriet is a torment to us both?”

“ Yes; since our visit to Mrs. Elford, I may say so; but you were the same before, when you must be sensible that you were uncommonly happy.”

“ Well, I hope you will have less cause to reproach me in future. I have promised to pass this week with Mrs. Hanson; and at my return, will bring you proofs of my attention.”

“ I am very sorry you have made any engagement for this week; I have invited Miss Pierce to be here, and she will think it very odd that you are from home.”

“ I am extremely sorry for it.”

“ You might have been so *civil* as to inform me of your design, in the morning; and I should not have invited her.”

“ I had no intention of making any engagement, when I left home.”

“Then you you may easily put it off; so sudden an engagement must be of little consequence.”

“I wish much Miss Pierce’s visit could be postponed a few days.”

“Indeed! Would it not be just as proper to postpone yours?”

“No other time will be so convenient for mine; but perhaps a short delay may be of little importance to her.”

“How can you tell that? Nothing, surely, can be easier, than for you to send an apology to Mrs. Hanson.”

“It is really not in my power.”

“Not in your power! A very pretty expression, truly! I wonder what mighty matter should put it out of your power.”

“Many things, Prudence, may happen to do so.”

“ No doubt, you are a person of great consequence; *your* engagements cannot be dispensed with.”

“ You know, I generally accommodate mine to yours; but this one, unluckily, cannot be delayed.”

“ It is strange a visit to Mrs. Hanson’s should be of such importance, that you cannot give it up to oblige your *sister*.”

“ Most sincerely do I wish that I could.”

“ Why can you not? You have motives, I suppose, which I am not fit to be trusted with.”

“ I have none that are of the least consequence to you.”

“ I might think otherwise, but you do not choose to confide in me.—Thank heaven, I do not live with two Louisa’s! Harriet, with all her faults, is at least communicative; openness is a necessary bond of union in a family.”

“ Harriet’s gay temper makes her appear more communicative, but she does not certainly repose more confidence in you than I do.”

“ She always contrives to make herself agreeable; she has promised not to dine from home, while Miss Pierce is here, and I am sure, will do every thing in her power to entertain her. I wish you would follow her example a little.”

“ Yet it was but last night, you said it was a great misfortune to have such a sister.”

To be sure, her coquetry and extravagance are very distressing; but should I therefore be blind to her good qualities? When one is angry with people, one is very apt to exaggerate their failings.”

“ I have no desire to magnify her’s; but I wish ardently for a little of the indulgence you show her.”

“ She has no great indulgence to boast off from me:—what we do for her, in pecuniary matters, is not much to do for a sister.”

“ I should think it nothing if it could serve a good purpose, or we could afford it; but you say it is impossible for us to support her expense. If it continues, we must certainly give up our carriage.”

“ Do not speak of it;—it cannot be thought of: What would the world say ?”

“ The world would not trouble themselves about it.”

“ You are much mistaken :—it would excite *great observation* ; and I should be extremely sorry to hear the remarks people would make, on the Miss *Hargraves*’ giving up their carriage.”

“ But is there any retrenchment that would be so important, or so likely to correct Harriet’s conduct? She does not care what personal inconveniences we suffer.

“ We must bear with her a little longer; it is our duty. Who should be lenient to people’s faults, if it is not their relations? She is a very near relation.”

“ I am equally near, yet you have no indulgence for me, though I do a great deal more for you.”

“ My indulgence of Harriet is no compliment to her ; you know very well we must take her as she is ; we cannot alter her ; but I expect more from you, though I shall have little reason to do so, if you will not stay at home *one week* to oblige me.”

“ I am truly sorry that I cannot.”

“ It hurts me, Louisa, to see you so disobligng.”

“ Why will you call it disobligng ?”

“ What else can I call it ? But you may do as you please ; I shall not soon again ask a favour of you :—you know much better than *I do*, how you ought to conduct yourself.”

On saying these words, Miss Hargrave rose ; and, with a violent toss of her head, left the room.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS Hargrave would not vouchsafe to converse with Louisa when they met at tea. She appeared extremely majestic, and replied only by monosyllables, to any questions she was obliged to answer; resisting all Louisa's attempts to enter into conversation with her, by a scornful silence.

Louisa found it necessary to let her temper take its course, and consoled herself for her displeasure, by reflecting on the happy consequences, which she hoped would result from her visit to Mrs. Hanson. She likewise flattered herself, she might be able to soften Miss Hargrave's resentment, by returning in a day or two: for, when she considered how regular Valmonsor was in his attend-

ance at B——'s, she thought there could be little doubt of her meeting him there, the first day the weather would permit him to expect Harriet at Ramsgate.

But these pleasing expectations were speedily put an end to. Late in the evening, Harriet returned from her excursion, much indisposed with a severe headach, and other symptoms of disorder. She had found herself unwell in the morning; but from unwillingness to break a very agreeable engagement, she had spent the day abroad, and came home extremely fatigued and ill. She went directly to bed, passed the night painfully, and in the morning was so much worse, that her sisters thought it necessary to send for a physician, who pronounced her in a fever.

It was no longer possible for Louisa to think of going from home. Apologies were immediately sent to Mrs. Hanson and Miss Pierce; and Miss Hargrave and Louisa resigned themselves entirely to the duty they owed their sister.

The regret Louisa felt for her meeting with Valmonsor being delayed, was in some measure alleviated, by reflecting that he was now separated from her sister; and that she should certainly be able to obtain an interview with him, before Harriet could go abroad. The continuance of Constantia's unhappy state of suspense was much to be regretted; but it would at least be softened by all apprehensions from her rival being laid asleep.

She wrote immediately to Mrs. Almorne, to inform her of her confinement; adding that she would seize the first morning she was at liberty, to go to Ramsgate; and in the meanwhile, trusted they had little to fear except the anxiety unavoidable from delay.

She was not long, however, indulged in this hope. In the afternoon, a note was brought for Harriet, which, as she was able to read, Louisa delivered to her. After reading, she returned it, saying, "The last time I saw Valmonsor, I offered him any books that were in our library, and yesterday

morning sent him a list of them, that he might select what he thought proper; there is his answer;—do me the favour to reply to it, and let him know that I am unable to do it myself.”

Upon reading the note, Louisa found it contained a simple, though polite, acknowledgement of Harriet’s attention; with a request for one book only, being all it would be in his power to read, before he left Ramsgate; which he expected to do soon.

This intelligence occasioned Louisa the utmost concern, and led to a variety of doubts, which it was impossible to solve. She feared his regiment was about to depart, which would at once put an end to all her hopes; and even though he were only going to leave Ramsgate for a time, she dreaded the effects of absence, or that he might not return before Harriet was again at liberty to renew her machinations.

Her only hope was, that he would not

think of departing without coming to Oak Hill; and to encourage him to do so, she mentioned in her answer to his note, Harriet's illness, in a way that would not prevent, but might rather induce him to come; regretted much his intended departure; and said, that she should certainly expect to have the pleasure of seeing him at Oak Hill, before he left Ramsgate.

When this note was dispatched, she suffered herself again to indulge hopes of seeing him soon; but the next day, she received from him a note of inquiry after Harriet; in which he said, that though he would, during his stay in Ramsgate, take the liberty of troubling her with frequent inquiries after her sister, he should not think of intruding on her in person, as his visits, during Miss Harriet's illness, could only be troublesome.

Here was an end to all expectation of seeing him before his departure, and consequently to all hope of serving Constantia, whose loss of him, she now considered as inevitable.

“ Good Heavens!” she exclaimed, in an agony of despair, “ why am not I permitted to go to him?—Why must I remain here, when it might be in my power to save from misery, one of the most excellent of the human kind?—For what do I make such a sacrifice? For my sister, who is ill.—But is my presence of importance to her? Of none, certainly, since she is carefully attended by another sister,—by a skilful physician, and faithful servants. My absence could not injure her, though my remaining here may ruin the peace of my friend.—Ought I not then to leave her?—No;—the laws of decency require that I should continue in the same house with her, whatever may be my calls elsewhere, unless I could evince to the world, that I had a superior duty to fulfil.

Were I now to reside with Mrs. Hanson,—were I to walk the streets of Ramsgate, while my sister is in a fever, I should be branded as unfeeling,—unnatural,—as equally devoid of decency and sense.—Why is all this? By what duty am I bound to act in this manner?—Surely virtue demands that I should serve Constantia. She is a blessing to

all around her; in promoting her welfare, I do a benefit to others; to the sister of my heart; to the friend to whom I am united by the ties of affection, esteem, and consanguinity. But Harriet is a nearer relation; though I neither regard nor esteem her,—though I consider her as a pestilence, spreading destruction wherever she moves; yet still her claim upon me, by virtue of the ties of blood obliges me to neglect the interests of my friend. My feelings,—my reason tells me this is wrong; but respect for appearances constrains me to act in opposition to my conscience. Strange situation! painful necessity! Oh! how difficult it is to support affliction without the consciousness of acting right!”

Such were the reflections of Louisa, while she sat by the bed-side of Harriet, to whom she paid every attention that humanity or decorum could require.

CHAPTER IX.



THOUGH Harriet's disorder was a fever, the symptoms were far from dangerous, yet the report of her being ill excited the concern of all her acquaintance, and Oak Hill was crowded with messengers to inquire how she did.

Many of her friends, not satisfied with sending, came in person to ask after her, and to testify their concern for a friend, who was so dear to them; but, happily, for Louisa, Tresilian was not of the number. He was absent on the excursion he had mentioned to her, which prevented her hearing of him, till Harriet's fever was at a crisis, and her physician had declared her entirely out of danger.

At this period Tresilian returned home, and hearing of her illness, came immediately to Oak Hill.

Upon inquiring of the servants, he was informed that Harriet was better; that Miss Hargrave was attending her, and that Louisa, who had been up with her all night, was in the parlour writing an answer to a note.

He immediately sent his compliments to Louisa; requesting permission to wait upon her for a few minutes.

No visitor could have been so unwelcome. Fatigued and dispirited to the lowest degree, she felt herself incapable of assuming the firmness she wished to command in his presence; and her heart, ever timid, died with apprehension of the pain she must suffer in seeing the grief he would feel for the illness of Harriet,—yet hearing from the servant that he was informed how she was employed, she thought herself compelled by politeness to admit him.

When he entered the room, she en-

deavoured to address him, but found herself so much agitated, that she was obliged to remain silent.

He saw her emotion, and begged she would forgive his intruding, when she was not in a state to receive visitors,—“But,” continued he, “I was anxious to see you for a moment, and did not apprehend you were so much exhausted by fatigue, and anxiety, as you appear to be.”

“You were anxious,” said Louisa, in tremulous accents, “to know how Harriet was; her fever has never been alarming, and Dr. Welby assured us last night, that she would speedily recover.”

“Then why this mournful appearance? If her illness has never been alarming, why have you suffered anxiety to prey upon you, till it has nearly destroyed you? You must not,—indeed you must not be thus careless of yourself.”

Louisa attempted some expressions of acknowledgment for his solicitude about her;

but she had hardly uttered a few words indistinctly, when he interrupted her, saying: “But why should I blame your anxiety?—Amiable as you are, how could you feel otherwise for so charming a sister, so invaluable a friend!”

These expressions did not tend to compose the perturbed spirits of Louisa; her emotion increased, and with it his concern;—he feelingly expressed his sympathy in her distress, and urged her to be careful of herself.

The softness,—the tenderness of his manner, though springing from attachment to Harriet, affected her powerfully;—she felt at the instant, to a degree she had never done before, how dear, how valuable his affection might have been to her, and the conviction that he was lost to her for ever, filled her heart with an anguish, which she could not wholly conceal: her tears flowed, while in vain she attempted to speak.

Tresilian appeared sensibly touched by her distress.—He took her tenderly by the

hand, and in the most soothing accents endeavoured to soften her concern ; but every word that he said was a dagger to her heart.

“ How charming !” said he, “ does this sensibility make you appear ! But it is just what I expected : the moment I heard of your sister’s illness, I knew you would show yourself all kindness and goodness,—that you would devote yourself to her, and be forgetful of yourself.—How valuable such affection ! how beautiful such harmony between sisters !”

Unable any longer to listen to language, which awakened the keenest sense of her misfortunes, Louisa made an effort to rise,—but the attempt made her only more sensible of her weakness ; she was obliged to sit still, overcome by her sensations, and dreading every instant what she was to hear.

From the painfulness of this situation, she was in some measure relieved by the entrance of Miss Hargrave, who advanced with an air of extreme surprise at her appearance.

Tresilian observing this, said, “ Miss Louisa,

Madam, has been thus affected by talking of her sister's illness ; it is a subject which must awaken all her sensibility ; but as Dr. Welby thinks Miss Harriet is recovering, I trust a very few days will completely remove your apprehensions."

"It is to be expected," answered Miss Hargrave, "that Harriet will very soon be well; Louisa is wrong to indulge so much anxiety; since the commencement of Harriet's illness she has been absorbed in grief; but I did not think she had so little command of her feelings, as to trouble you with her distresses."

"It was not necessary, Madam, for me to see it, to know what she must suffer for her sister. I was perfectly aware of it before I came here; and whether absent or present with you, ladies, your afflictions must ever command my sympathy."

"We are greatly obliged to you, Sir."

"Your situation, Madam, has excited the concern of all your acquaintance."

“ They are extremely good, Sir.”

“ It is easy to imagine what must be felt, on the slightest apprehension of losing such a sister as Miss Harriet,—the delight of her acquaintance, and an ornament to society.”

“ The loss of a valuable sister is certainly a very heavy calamity.”

“ May I hope,” said Tresilian, addressing Louisa, “ that you will not allow anxiety wholly to overcome you: that you will, for Miss Harriet’s sake, exert yourself, lest she may want, in her turn, the consolation you now require?”

Louisa made no answer.

“ I shall not, ladies,” resumed Tresilian, “ intrude upon you longer at present, but hope I shall soon find you better; I will call often, and, when it is convenient, shall hope to be admitted.”

He then left them; and, the moment he was gone, Miss Hargrave broke out into a

passionate invective against Louisa, for affecting such distress before him, as to be incapable of speaking.

“It was no affectation,” replied Louisa: how could I speak, when wounded to the soul to see him so much deceived both in Harriet and me.”

“Then why did you deceive him? Why not conceal your distress? What can he think, but that you are one angel, Harriet another, and I a very ordinary mortal?—This is all the reward I get for acting an honest part.”

“You deceived him more than I did, by saying I had been absorbed in grief since Harriet’s illness.”

“Is it not true? Have you not been the figure of despair since the moment she became ill?”

“But could you imagine that she was the cause of my affliction?”

“What else could I think? Your grief, and her illness, took place at the same time.”

“But do you not know what I think of her?”

“I do:—but, as you had once much affection for her, I very naturally thought the fear of her death had awakened former kindness, and made you forget all her faults.”

Alas! thought Louisa, how impenetrable are the intricacies of situation, when even you, who know Harriet and me so well, should thus mistake the cause of my concern!

“But,” said Miss Hargrave, after a pause, “I am displeased with you, Louisa, on more accounts than one; the distress you showed before Tresilian, was not more provoking than the cold reserve you show about Harriet on other occasions. What can people think of the dry answers you give about her? The other day, when Mrs. Hartfree came to condole with us, would you not have suffered her to exhaust herself, without deigning a reply, if I had not sometimes relieved her?”

“ I thanked her very gratefully for her kindness to us:—it was only during her praises of Harriet I was silent:—could I join in them, without the sacrifice of sincerity ?”

“ You should do as I do. Did you not observe just now how I contrived to answer Trevelian, without injury to my veracity ?”

“ Evasive answers are very disagreeable. If Mrs. Hartfree knew your real sentiments of Harriet, would she not think you guilty of the grossest hypocrisy, if not of falsehood ?”

“ Hypocrisy cannot be avoided in such cases: besides, I talked chiefly of Harriet’s talents, not of her good qualities; but you are as silent about the one as the other.”

“ Because I do not think of either as others do.”

“ And why do you not? Whatever objection you may have to her heart, you can have none to her head.”

“ There is a great deal of borrowed lustre

about Harriet, which leads people to over-rate her parts."

"O yes; to be sure you are the best judge of talents; 'you are wiser than all Harriet's acquaintance."

"I may certainly have more opportunity of knowing her."

"Depend upon it, you will only be thought to have more envy. We should be torn to pieces for ill-nature, were we to say what we think of Harriet."

"There is no occasion to say what we think; but neither is there any for appearing to think otherwise than we do: let us preserve integrity by silence."

"Our silence would be interpreted envy; women are easily suspected of jealousy,—especially of a handsome sister."

"Liberal conclusions should be drawn, when circumstances are not exactly known."

“Should be!—But can you imagine that they will?—You know nothing at all of the world. Did not even Mrs. Elford acknowledge she thought your reluctance to join in Harriet’s praise a defect in your character, till severe experience opened her eyes?”

“Mrs. Elford was peculiarly situated.”

“Ay, but the generality of people will do just as she did; they will overlook the most glaring defects in persons they like, till they touch themselves; then, indeed, they are all eyes and ears: I have seen this a thousand times.”

“If it is so, I would rather be accused of ill-nature, than guilty of insincerity.”

“Well, I must be content to do what is right, as far as I can, without the total sacrifice of my interest; I cannot fight against the world.”

“The acting sincerely is of the first importance to my own happiness; but the good of others likewise requires the strictest ad-

herence to truth. Few persons are sufficiently observant of it : like you, many good people are satisfied if their intentions are right, and have little scruple about what are called *white* lies ; but this temporising kind of morality, has the most pernicious effects on society.”

“ And how pray, do you fancy the business of life can be carried on without a few white lies ? They are perfectly understood, and many persons, who practise them, would as little as yourself, be guilty of a falsehood, that could be attended with any bad consequences.”

“ Who can tell what may be the consequence of small deviations from truth ? Do not the most important events often turn on the most trifling circumstances ? And how can you know when to trust in my veracity, if you discover me in the practice of white lies ? What I may really think such, may not prove so to you. For example, if in consequence of the manner in which you have fostered Mrs. Hartfree’s good opinion of Harriet, she should persuade her son to marry her, what misery might ensue to both ?”

“ A great deal to be sure ; but could I act otherwise than I did without ruining myself ? ”

“ There is no lesson I ever got from Mrs. Almorne, which experience, and reflection, more forcibly evince the truth of, than that the most rigid veracity is of the highest importance to the good of society. ”

“ This reasoning is very fine, Louisa, and you know that in general my conduct is perfectly honest and upright ; but where Harriet is concerned, sincerity is utterly impracticable. We must treat our relatives with a lenity, and conceal their failings with a care, which would be very wrong respecting others ; in short, with regard to relations, people’s consciences must be made of stretching leather. ”

“ But if the leather is in the practice of stretching on one occasion, will it not be too apt to stretch upon others ? ”

“ People must do as they can ;—but we must not sit talking here : if Dr. Welby should come, and find neither of us with Harriet, he would think it very odd. ”

“How much odder would he think it, if he knew that you would hardly regret her death? When he anxiously endeavoured to prevent your having fears about her safety, expressed concern for your suffering, and lavished encomiums on her character, did you tranquilly assume the melancholy face you wore, and answer in sympathetic tone to all that he said?”

“No, certainly; it was not very agreeable, but what could I do? However, Louisa, though I said that I would not regret her death, do not therefore imagine, I regret her recovery. I only meant when I saw you so unhappy, to remind you, that if it pleased heaven to take her from us, we ought not to lament it even for her own sake, as there was no knowing in what distress her coquetry and extravagance might involve her, since she had already impoverished us, and destroyed the peace of Mrs. Elford.”

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Louisa was thus occupied at Oak Hill, Constantia remained in a very unhappy state of mind. Valmonsor was still a stranger at the Abbey, and the misery his absence occasioned, became gradually so mixed with disapprobation, as threatened to destroy the pleasure she had hitherto found in her affection for him, if it did not destroy the attachment itself.

Mrs. Almorne concealed from her the conversation Harriet Hargrave had had with him at the cottage ; but on the commencement of Harriet's illness, she informed her of what he had said to Louisa at B——'s, which, in Mrs. Almorne's opinion, showed he was under some mistake, that must afford an apology for his conduct, if it did not altogether

excuse it. The observations too, which Tressilian had made upon him, rendered it highly probable that he was not happier than herself; and that however unaccountable his behaviour might appear, there must be some extraordinary cause for it, of which she ought to wait the explanation, before she allowed herself to decide against him.

The opinion of Mrs. Almorne, and the informations she gave Constantia, softened her displeasure against Valmonsor, without affording her all the consolation Mrs. Almorne expected. She could not enter thoroughly into the idea of his interpreting unfavourably any part of her conduct, when she had not given him the slightest cause of offence; nor could she rest much hope on Louisa's being able to discover the mystery, as she fancied a thousand obstacles would occur to prevent her design, which no person, less interested than herself, could have imagined.

At this period her eldest brother came alone to Ornvile. When he did not bring con-

panions with him, his visits were generally so prompted by sinister motives that they excited more fear and curiosity, than satisfaction in his sister. On this occasion, however, he appeared to have no design in view, but the passing some time in the society of his family, and his behaviour was so proper, that for once his presence was an advantage to Constantia. He treated her in the most gracious manner, paid much kind attention to his father and mother, and took so active a part in entertaining any company that came to the Abbey, that she found herself relieved from much painful exertion, which before his arrival she had been obliged to employ.

One morning as she was taking a walk with him near the house, she saw Valmonsor and Tresilian approaching on horseback. The fear and agitation into which the appearance of Valmonsor immediately threw her, made her rejoice in the presence of her brother, which a few weeks before she would have regretted, and she clung to his arm, as if it had been her only means of preservation.

He asked if she knew who accompanied

Tresilian? She answered it was Captain Valmonsor, a friend of Sir Esmond Anson, who had introduced him to her father.

Valmonsor and Tresilian now drew near, and having alighted, came up to them. The latter addressed Constantia and Ornvile with his usual ease and cheerfulness, but Valmonsor hung back in a grave embarrassed manner.

Constantia no less embarrassed, and agitated by a variety of feelings, addressed him in a slight awkward way, and then introducing her brother to him, left them to converse together, while she endeavoured to engage the attention of Tresilian, as she directed her steps towards the house.

In a few minutes they arrived there, and upon entering the saloon found Lady Ornvile and Sir Thomas Vyner reading newspapers.

Constantia took a seat where there was a vacant chair on each side, that Valmonsor

might place himself next her if he chose it ; but he took a seat at a distance, near Lady Ornvile, with whom he entered into conversation.

Tresilian sat down beside Constantia, while Ornvile advancing to Sir Thomas, made some inquiries about the news of the day.

“ I see in the newspaper, Mr. Tresilian,” said Lady Ornvile, “ the marriage of your cousin Miss Nugent to Mr. Heathfield ; how will her family be pleased with the connexion ? ”

TRESILIAN. “ Not well, I fear, Madam ; as she is not rich, they object to his want of fortune.”

ORNVILLE. “ The objection ought to have prevented the marriage.”

SIR THOMAS. “ Mr. Heathfield’s fortune, I presume, is not so very small ; he has always lived upon it independently and respectably.”

C RNVILLE. “ For a single man of his in-

insipid cast it might do tolerably well ; but with Miss Nugent it must be deplorable poverty."

SIR THOMAS. " Miss Nugent is a fine girl, and will conform to his circumstances."

ORNVILLE. " She is a girl of taste, and cannot be expected to change her mode of life entirely."

SIR THOMAS. " Marriages of affection should be applauded, when there is no marked imprudence attending them."

ORNVILLE. " They should only be approved, when there is fortune on one side or other."

SIR THOMAS. " What do you call fortune? It is a very indefinite term."

ORNVILLE. " I call fortune what is necessary to preserve our proper consequence, and secure us the comforts to which we are entitled by our rank."

SIR THOMAS. “ Why not relinquish some of those comforts for an agreeable companion? Too much is sacrificed to nominal advantages.—It is disgusting to see the eagerness of some mothers to get their daughters what they call well married; that is, provided with a good settlement. A man’s age, understanding, and character, are circumstances little regarded.”

ORNVILLE. “ Mothers are necessitated to think of securing good establishments for their girls, because they know poverty to be the greatest of all misfortunes; the parent of numerous ills, and ultimate destroyer of all good.”

SIR THOMAS. “ Interested marriages are the bane of civil society. We see the consequences of them in high life; and if in the middling ranks, they are something less pernicious to morals, they are no less fatal to happiness.”

ORNVILLE. “ Take care, Sir Thomas, take care, that in checking interested marriages, you do not give too much encourage-

ment to girls to throw themselves away upon fellows not worth a farthing ; the consequence of which is, that in a few years they are thrown back an intolerable burden upon their relations.”

During this conversation about Miss Nugent, Constantia ventured two or three times to look at Valmonsor, and saw him evidently betray uneasiness; but on this last speech from her brother, he changed colour, and looked so unhappy, that she could not help feeling for him.

His behaviour surprised her ; for if he had given her up, why should the sentiments of her brother affect him?—But however it was, she felt so much concern for him, as to rejoice extremely, that the entrance of her father put an end to the conversation.

Sir John addressed Valmonsor, and Tresilian with great kindness, and in a pleasant way challenged them both as truants.

Tresilian answered gaily to the charge,

pleaded guilty, and promised amendment; Valmonsor gravely expressed regret for his absence, which he said was owing to his having been so much indisposed as to be unfit for company.

Sir John kindly lamented his indisposition, but hoped he should now have the satisfaction of seeing him often. He then began to converse with him on indifferent topics; in which Sir Thomas Vyner and Ornvile joined.

Constantia seeing them thus engaged, took the opportunity to ask Tresilian how he, and Valmonsor had happened to come to the Abbey together.

“ I met him this morning in Ramsgate,” he replied; “ and as I stopt a moment to speak to him, a friend of mine joined us, and proposed we should take a ride; I told him I could not, as I was going to Ornvile; upon which Valmonsor immediately asked, if I would permit him to accompany me? I very readily assented, and was glad of his company; but I had little cause to rejoice, for he seemed at

times so lost in thought, as almost to forget that I was with him."

"I have seen him very absent," said Constantia.

"I believe on his arrival, he would have rejoiced to have been completely so; for as we drew near the house, and saw you leaning on your brother's arm, he stopt suddenly, and seemed disposed to make a precipitate retreat. Lord Woodford, I presume? said he, with an alarmed aspect: It is Mr. Ornvile, answered I; upon which he recovered from his terror, and ventured to proceed. Has he any extraordinary aversion to my Lord?"

"I did not even know they were acquainted," answered Constantia.

"Tresilian replied only by a very significant smile, which plainly evinced the conclusion he drew.

It led her immediately to recollect the persuasion many persons had of Woodford's attachment to her, and that it was, therefore, probable Valmonsor had heard of it. This

idea wrought an instantaneous change on her mind. She regarded his behaviour as an unequivocal proof of his being still deeply interested in her, since he could not govern his feelings so far, as to conceal from Tresilian the apprehension he felt on seeing her with a rival.

She now regretted the cold awkward reception she had given him; a reception excited by a variety of uncontrollable emotions, of which wounded pride made a part:—she feared it might even have conveyed more than she was conscious of, and would now give confirmation to his mistakes.

Was there no way to remedy this? In vain she looked the way Valmonsor was;—he was engaged in conversation with her brother, and his face was averted from her.

“I hope,” said she to Tresilian, with whom, while these thoughts were passing in her mind, she was endeavouring to support a conversation he had introduced about the Hargraves, “you, and your companion, mean to pass the day with us?”

“ I am very sorry,” replied he, “ that I must be gone in a few minutes, being engaged at home with company, and Valmonsor says he must dine at Ramsgate.”

On hearing this, despair seized the heart of Constantia. It was with difficulty she could any longer understand, or attend to what Trisilian said; and she would hardly have been able to conceal the agitation she suffered, had not her father relieved her by engaging his attention during the short time he remained.

When Tresilian rose to depart, Valmonsor rose also to take leave. Sir John and Lady Orville invited them politely to remain, but they pleaded indispensable engagements.

As Valmonsor advanced towards the door, he passed near Constantia, and stopt a moment to bid her farewell. His look,—his voice, in pronouncing the word farewell,—seemed to convey more than he expressed; she opened her lips to speak, but her voice faltered—she scarcely dared to look, and could not articulate a word.—He gave her a

melancholy, reproachful look, and passed on.

Now, thought Constantia, all is over! I shall never see him more. He will mistake for indifference, for every thing that is disagreeable; a behaviour that was the offspring of the purest affection.—Oh! how truly did Mrs. Almorne say that one mistake might be the beginning of endless perplexities. She warned me to be on my guard, and receive him with kindness, till I should be convinced he was blamable; yet though his look, his voice,—his whole behaviour at parting, assured me of his affection, I had not power to drop one conciliating expression.

With a heart filled with regret and despair, Constantia withdrew from her family, to mourn in private the loss of Valmonsor.

CHAPTER XI.

LOUISA had suffered so much from her meeting with Tresilian, that she durst not trust herself again in his presence, and therefore became constant in her attendance upon Harriet, at the hours there was any chance of his calling. This was very agreeable to Miss Hargrave, who was always glad to receive visitors, and most willingly relieved Louisa from them.

Tresilian called three mornings successively after his meeting with Louisa, and on the last, informed Miss Hargrave, that he was going next day on a tour of visits, which would detain him some time from home.

Louisa heard of his design with extreme satisfaction, and hoped his absence would be so long as might permit her to recover sufficient strength of mind to meet him with her usual apparent ease and indifference. She knew that he had for sometime meditated a distant excursion, which he had probably delayed from reluctance to part from Harriet, and now chose the period of her confinement to put in execution.

Harriet was recovering fast. Her fever had been of very short duration, and so gentle in its effects, that it was to be expected she would quickly be restored to health. This gave Louisa the prospect of being soon at liberty to go to Ramsgate, where she knew that Valmonsor still was, by his inquiries after Harriet.

From his remaining, she imagined he had been disappointed of getting leave of absence; and though this flattered her with the hope of having more time for a meeting with him, it did not lessen her anxiety, to obtain it soon. His stay might be precarious;

at all events, it was of much consequence to see him before Harriet should be able to go abroad ; and she had now, if possible, more cause than ever, to wish for a conversation with him.

Till she was informed by Constantia of his visit to Orville with Tresilian, she had indulged the hope that their meeting might produce an explanation ; but this hope was now over. She had no doubt that his going to the Abbey with Tresilian, proceeded from fear of meeting with Constantia alone ; and since he had, by this visit, acquitted himself in some degree of the attention due to the family, it was probable that he would be very long in returning. It was likewise to be feared, that the behaviour of Constantia would strengthen his mistakes, and make him endeavour to eradicate a passion, which he would consider as decidedly unfortunate. Under these circumstances, he might become an easy prey to Harriet ; who, she was certain, would exert all her skill to entangle him, the instant she was able to get to Ramsgate. The only hope, therefore, that

remained of saving him from Harriet, or restoring him to Constantia, depended on her having an opportunity of conversing with him immediately and ; she determined to go to Mrs. Hanson's the very first moment she could with any propriety leave home.

CHAPTER XII

THE second day that Harriet was able to sit in her dressing-room, Louisa thought there was no longer any occasion to delay her visit to Mrs. Hanson, and took the first opportunity she was alone with Miss Hargrave, to propose it.

“It is very strange,” answered Miss Hargrave, “that you should think of leaving Harriet so soon?”

“She is so well,” replied Louisa, “that I cannot think there is any impropriety in leaving her.”

“It is, however, very odd, that you

should leave her for Mrs. Hanson, whom you can go to any time."

"I wish to go now; you know I was disappointed of visiting her the week that Harriet was taken ill."

"But since you missed that week, it can make little difference now, what time you go."

"It is of consequence to me to go at present."

"I don't understand that;—I can't see why you should be so anxious to be with Mrs. Hanson."

"You may believe I am not thus anxious from a trifling cause; I am little inclined to go from home, and should not think of going to Mrs. Hanson's for idle amusement."

"It shows great want of consideration of me, Louisa, to propose going from home at present; it must confine me completely, and I stand very much in need of air and exercise."

“ There is no occasion for your being confined ; you may be abroad several hours a day, without any inconvenience to Harriet.”

“ It is not for a few hours I desire to be at liberty. I should wish in a few days to go from home altogether a little, in order to change the scene, and recruit my spirits. Miss Prune has long been asking a visit from me, and would think my making it now particularly kind, as she is in daily expectation of her brother’s death.”

“ If that is her situation, it must be ill calculated to recruit your spirits.”

“ Will you never, Louisa, remember any thing you hear ? How often have I told you, that he was a very bad brother ?”

“ I do not forget that ; but as you mentioned his death as a motive for your visit, I was led to suppose it occasioned her some kind of distress.”

“ It will occasion her none at all ;—but till he is dead and buried, and perhaps a little

longer, she cannot be in company, or appear cheerful before any one, except such a friend as myself."

"As he was known to be so indifferent a brother, I should not suppose there was much occasion for affecting sorrow?"

"You are mistaken;—as they never quarrelled publicly, decency requires that she should appear concerned. Don't you remember how Miss Milner was censured by Miss Rawlinson, for appearing cheerful eight days after she heard of the death of a brother she had not seen since she was a child, and never had any reason to esteem?"

"Well, it may be necessary for her to appear grave for a time; but I hope the delaying your visit for a few days, cannot be important either to you or her."

"So you *really* think I ought to be the person to yield?"

"I have very urgent motives for wishing

to go to Ramsgate immediately, or I should not oppose my wishes to yours."

"I can form no opinion of their urgency, unless I knew them."

"I should mention them at once, if they did not relate to another."

"I hate secrets."

"I have none that are of the least consequence to you."

"There should be no concealments between affectionate sisters; especially from one, who being nine years older than yourself, may be supposed well qualified to advise you."

"I have really no affairs that require the least consultation."

"If you have none of your own, you have of others. I cannot be easy about you;—clandestine affairs are never right."

"You may make yourself perfectly easy ;

I am engaged in no affairs that are improper."

"Young women have no business;—their having secret transactions must therefore excite the anxiety of their best friends."

"Why will you trouble yourself about nothing? Be assured you have not the least cause for apprehension."

"What is to assure me of that? You may not be the person principally concerned in your *secret dealings*; but it would be nearly as distressing to me to suppose, that you were carrying on an improper connection for your bosom friend Constantia. I know no other person whose affairs you can have to manage."

"Prudence," said Louisa earnestly, disturbed by her suspicions, "the business I have at Ramsgate is undertaken at the particular desire of Mrs. Almoré; let that satisfy you of its propriety."

"O Miss! if you are in the hands of Mrs.

Almorne, I have done with you : she is much fitter than I am to advise you ; but she ought to teach you to have some consideration for your *sisters* ;—it will be well for you, if her friendship can compensate to you for theirs.”

Upon saying this, Miss Hargrave rose with a very angry countenance, and quitted the room, as she generally did, when a dispute did not terminate entirely to her satisfaction.

Louisa was much vexed by her behaviour, as she could not act in defiance of her wishes without regret. She hoped, however, a little reflection would restore her to a more reasonable temper ; and, should she continue refractory, she resolved to request Harriet to bring her into a better humour, which she knew Harriet would readily endeavour to do, and was much more capable of effecting than herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the afternoon, a solemn gravity, indicative of high-toned displeasure, appearing in the whole behaviour of Miss Hargrave, Louisa determined to wait no longer the return of her good humour, but to engage the good offices of Harriet in conciliating her.

For this purpose she went to Harriet's room, and sitting down by her with her work in her hand, she said in an easy way: "At the time you were taken ill Harriet, I had engaged to spend a few days with Mrs. Hanson, which your illness prevented; now you are recovered, I should wish to fulfil my engagement; have you any objection?"

"None, certainly; I shall be very glad

that you should get a little amusement after your confinement."

"Unluckily, Prudence opposes my design; she says her spirits require to be recruited, and she wishes to make a visit to Miss Prune; but as she has made no engagement with her, I am very desirous that my visit should take place first."

"If she persists in opposing it, I shall insist upon your both going; for I am really so well, that neither of you should be under any restraint."

"I could not be easy in our both leaving you, nor would Prudence consent to it; she would think our credit for ever destroyed, by appearing so neglectful of you."

"Let her go first then, and you shall follow immediately, without any sacrifice of decorum. I have only to give you some commissions to execute for me at Ramsgate, and it may appear you are there on that account. The distance is so trifling, you will hardly be

thought absent, nor will any one know your excursion was designed before her departure."

"This scheme might perhaps answer, if she could be hurried away, but I do not believe she is at all prepared for a distant journey; my visit might, therefore, be over, before her's could begin; and my wish is, that you would persuade her to let mine take place first: you have more influence over her than I have."

"I shall certainly do every thing in my power; but if she does not either depart immediately, or consent to your absence, I would have you go without considering her farther; for she can have no reasonable objection."

"Yet, if I should act against her inclination, it would be the source of endless reflections from her."

"It is true; it will be better to persuade her to let you go amicably. I dare say I shall not find the task difficult, for she very pro-

bably never thought of her excursion, till you proposed yours."

"At least she never hinted any wish to leave home before; and I am inclined to think her opposition arose at first from a little feeling of jealousy. You know she is afraid of Mrs. Hanson's preferring us, and is always suspicious and fretful about trifles."

"Jealousy might give the first impulse to her behaviour, but it very possibly arose from the pure spirit of contradiction, which seems to be a part of her nature. But, Louisa, you have yourself to blame for the constant opposition she makes to all your little plans."

"How am I to blame? I do every thing in my power to oblige her."

"That is the very cause of her tyranny. Does she ever oppose me capriciously in any thing? Never; because she knows unreasonable opposition would be of no avail. She is sensible, I will take my own way when I think it right, and as I do it with good humour, it

has no bad consequences. Adopt the same plan, and you will find it succeed."

" I know not how I could attempt it. You do every thing in so easy and cheerful a way, that you cannot offend her, but in me opposition would appear unfeeling obstinacy."

" I confess you would be apt to look grave, when you ought to laugh; but if you could assume a little easy firmness, you might take your own way without giving offence. With some spirits, assumption is the only plan. Your submission to Prudence renders you miserable, without obliging her."

" True: she is never contented, whatever sacrifices I make."

" Nor ever will. It is time, Louisa, that you should no longer be treated as a child or dependent; be advised, and put an end to your thralldom, lest you should be tempted to get quit of her by a rash marriage."

" I own I have long ceased to wonder at the odd marriages of women, who were com-

pelled to live with relations; for there is no knowing the misery that may be privately inflicted by parents, brothers, or sisters."

"Beware of the remedy: it may prove worse than the disease. I have suffered less from Prudence than you, yet to my sorrow it has driven me a hundred times from home. I flew from her to houses, where, unfortunately, I found irresistible temptations to coquetry. Had I not been obliged to live with her, I am convinced I should have been a much better—at least a more harmless woman, than I have been."

"I can well believe it. Our situation with her, has taught me to be slow in condemning men, who have foolish, ill-tempered wives to contend with, for being little at their own firesides."

"Try then to make yours agreeable, that you may not be forced to seek another. Prudence can never be rendered a pleasing companion, but she may be made a quiet one."

“ Irritation often impels me to oppose her, but pity always returns to restrain me. Much as we may suffer by living with her, she is far more to be pitied for living with us. Can any thing be more galling, than the being constantly with persons, who make her feel a painful inferiority, and expose her to the most mortifying neglect ? Is there a visitor we have, her own particular friends excepted, who see or hear her, when you are present ? ”

“ Is there a visitor we have worth conversing with, who does not find the pleasure of conversation destroyed by her ? In her absence it sometimes flows delightfully ; but the moment she appears, it either stagnates, or into how dull or contemptible a channel does it run ?—We can never for a minute feel at home with her ; for domestic intercourse must be disagreeable among people composed of such opposite materials.”

“ However unfortunate this may be for us, its consequences are yet more so to her.”

“ But they are balanced by advantages.

We draw a circle about her, which gives her a consequence she prizes, and amusements she is fond of; but has she not deprived us of some of the most valuable connexions in the county? Did not Lady Mental say, that however agreeable we might be, the associating with Prudence was too heavy a tax to pay for our society."

"Lady Mental was too fastidious; she can no where expect to find agreeable society without some counterpoise."

"True: but to have a marplot always at one's elbow, is a serious vexation. I cannot blame her, for I have often myself avoided people on account of their disagreeable connexions. Indeed we so frequently lose, or gain consideration by the persons we live with, that it is only by living alone, we can hope to discover our true place in society."

"I confess I have often found myself drawn to a house by one member of a family, and driven from it by another."

"Does not Prudence even destroy the

pleasure which you and I might find in each other's company? She becomes either sullen, or angry, when we talk on subjects in which her knowledge and capacity do not enable her to join?"

"I am but too sensible that it is a misfortune to us all to live together. If she were the youngest sister, the evil would be less; but her superiority in years, places her in a situation, which renders our connexion most painful to her, and injurious to us. We should undoubtedly be much better without her, and were she separated from us, she would both be a happy, and useful member of society. She would then have the peaceable enjoyment of her own house, where she would be surrounded by persons, in whose company she would find comfort, and to whom she might be a blessing. To her sick friends, she would be a careful nurse; to her poor ones, a generous benefactor; to all, a sincere and affectionate companion; for she is capable of the most disinterested regard, and the evincing of it, would at once give her the pleasure of serving those she loved, and of

raising her own consequence. Unfortunately, all this propensity to do good is lost by residing with us."

" I believe there is much truth in what you say ; she would be an excellent friend, though she cannot be a good sister. She could not suffer from others the mortifications, nor could they excite in her the jealousy that we do. Neither could she, Louisa, show her ill-temper to any one except ourselves. It is to a sister only that she can dare to act in the manner she does to you, and it is by sisters only she cannot be laid under obligations. The kindness of others would engage her esteem, affection, and gratitude ; but from us she receives it merely as a right. The ties of blood, she thinks, give her an indefeasable claim to our services ; and I own myself so far influenced by her opinions, that I do not thank her for what she does for me, as I perceive it is not me, but our consanguinity that she regards. It would lead her to indulge me in a vice, though it will not induce her to study my comfort for an hour : such is the influence which the ties of blood often have

over weak minds, and sometimes over strong ones."

Louisa heaved a sigh.

"Do not sigh Louisa,—you may soon be emancipated; thank heaven you cannot marry Prudence."

"I may marry a worse character."

"Don't anticipate evil: 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the evening, Miss Hargrave preserved so stately an air whenever she addressed Louisa, that Harriet thought it prudent to allow her a night to come down from her elevation, before she spoke of Louisa's departure; but early in the morning, she took the first opportunity of mentioning it, and got her to consent to her wishes with tolerable complacency.

Louisa, who only waited to know the result of their conference, before she set out for Ramsgate, no sooner saw Miss Hargrave leave Harriet's apartment, than she repaired thither.

"I have succeeded," said Harriet, with a smile, when she entered; "you may go to Mrs. Hanson's as soon as you please, without

danger of giving offence. I brought her to confess, that she could not go to Miss Prune without first writing to her, and receiving an answer, which would consume at least five days, and against that time your visit might perhaps be over."

"Then," replied Louisa, "her opposition has really proceeded from a spirit of contradiction."

"Undoubtedly it has: she is ever governed by a fretful teasing disposition, which she may be frightened, but cannot be reasoned out of. You must not expect to manage her by gentle or reasonable means, for her capacity is too weak to admit of improvement. I suspect, however, she begins to be so much ashamed of her behaviour to you, that she will not object to your staying with Mrs. Hanson as long as you choose."

"I am so happy in being permitted to go quietly, that I shall not try her patience, by staying longer than is necessary."

“ She said she would not hurry your return ; and as your time may therefore be in your own power, would it be disagreeable to you to postpone your departure till to-morrow, as your being here to-day would be very convenient for me ? ”

“ If it is material to you, I shall certainly remain.”

“ I cannot say it is material, but it would be very agreeable. The matter is simply this :—I expect Captain Valmonsor here to-day, about two o'clock ; a little occurrence the last day I saw him, brings him sooner than my illness would otherwise have permitted, and I wish to see him alone. You know how troublesome and inquisitive Prudence always is about nothing ; and I can have no security against her molesting me when he is here, unless you are in the way to keep her engaged.”

The astonishment and vexation of Louisa, during this speech, were inexpressible. Happily her face was not seen by Harriet, or it

would have betrayed the agitation she felt ; and, by the time Harriet had ceased speaking, she had so far recovered the command of her feelings, as to say, with some composure, that she would not leave home till the next morning, and would endeavour to prevent Prudence from troubling her.

“ I should wish,” returned Harriet, “ not only to prevent her being with me while he is here, but to conceal his visit from her altogether, that she may not worry me for ever with questions about him.”

“ Will it not appear odd, that he should be here, without seeing us ?”

“ I do not mean that he should not see you ; but if his visit to me is over before he joins you, you may, perhaps, by a little address, and talking faster than usual, contrive to prevent her knowing that he has been with me.”

Louisa replied, that she would endeavour to do so, which might be the less difficult, as at two o'clock there were generally visitors with her.

Finding Harriet satisfied with this assurance, and not inclined to converse further, she gladly left her, to give relief, in private, to her perturbed spirits.

A meeting with Valmonsor, which the combined efforts of Mrs. Almorne, Constantia, and herself, had so long endeavoured in vain to accomplish, she now saw obtained by Harriet, as if by a wish, even at the moment when her situation seemed to render it impracticable. Her grief and surprise at the occurrence were so great, that it was some time before she could reflect on it with any composure. How to account for his visiting Harriet, before she was so well as to receive other company, she was wholly at a loss, without supposing he was already more entangled with her than could be wished. It was easy to imagine he might be so, without being indifferent about Constantia; and what might not be the consequence of such meetings with Harriet,—of such arts as hers, when aided by confirmed displeasure at Constantia!

She now regarded him as a victim ready to fall into a snare, from which it would be impossible to extricate him ; and pity for him, as well as sorrow for her friend, took possession of her breast.

At length, however, she began to condemn his conduct, as highly blamable. Whatever apparent cause of displeasure he might have at Constantia, was it sensible,—was it generous,—to refuse her an opportunity of explaining or repairing her errors?

Yet, on reflecting more dispassionately on the character and whole behaviour of Valmonsor, it was impossible for her not to suppose that he must be the dupe of some extraordinary delusion, the author of which must undoubtedly be Harriet. No other person could be interested in separating him from Constantia ; and, from the impressions she knew Harriet had given him at the cottage, it might easily be imagined she had infused a thousand other suspicions into his mind, equally erroneous and pernicious.

The next reflection was, whether it might not now be too late to correct his mistakes. This apprehension affected deeply the generous heart of Louisa. Her ardent friendship for Constantia, made her regard her happiness far more than her own; and the fear of its being blasted in so cruel a way, afflicted her in the most poignant manner.

CHAPTER XV

MISERABLY did the time, short as it was, linger with Louisa, till the moment in which she expected Valmonsor at Oak Hill. For some time before it, she sat at a window, watching his arrival;—with an aching heart she saw him appear, and heard him conducted up stairs to Harriet. Miss Hargrave was fortunately engaged with visitors, which prevented Louisa's having the painful task of conversing with her; but the time Valmonsor passed with Harriet, was otherwise sufficiently heavy. Independent of her concern for the fate of Constantia, she felt all the anxiety and indignation, which naturally arise in a virtuous mind, on fearing the triumph of cruelty and treachery.

In less than an hour she heard Harriet's bell ring. She instantly quitted the room she was in, and met Valmonsor at the bottom of the stair.

He accosted her civilly, and she politely invited him to accompany her to Miss Hargrave; but he begged to be excused, declaring he had an engagement which obliged him to depart.

She repeated her request; adding that a few minutes delay could not materially affect his engagement. He again declined compliance, saying he could not think of intruding on Miss Hargrave for a few hurried moments, when he might hope to have the pleasure of waiting upon her the next day, as he was then engaged to make another visit to Miss Harriet.

Here was fresh cause of uneasiness to Louisa; one visit to Harriet was but the prelude to another; and day after day he would thus be entangled, till he was completely secured in her net.

Impelled by despair, she went instantly to Harriet, to try if she could discover, by her behaviour, how she had been pleased with his visit.

On entering the room, she was extremely struck with her appearance. Her illness had given unusual softness and delicacy to her features and complexion; and her dress was the most elegant and becoming dishabille she had ever seen.

She was so much struck with this proof of her unwearied endeavours to captivate, that she could not help exclaiming, “ Surely, Harriet, you have intended to make a conquest of Valmonsor! I never saw you dressed with so much taste!”

“ My dress,” replied Harriet, “ only happens to hit your fancy; for I have certainly been dressed with as much taste a hundred times before, when you did not take any notice of it.”

“ That may be, for I am stupid enough ;

but your attire to-day is at least quite new ; you must have got it for the present occasion."

" Yes ; I sent Hannah to Ramsgate for it ; I did not choose to see Valmonsor in an ordinary style."

" Oh ! Harriet, have you no scruples ?"

" There is no occasion for any with him."

" Why less with him than others ?"

" He is unconnected, and must want amusement ; military men are always at a loss for it in country quarters."

" And you think a passion for you will be mere amusement to him !"

" Louisa, you always think of love as a serious affair ; believe me, few men make it so."

" Valmonsor is probably one of those few he is evidently a man of sensibility."

“Be assured he is extremely capable of taking care of himself; so much so, that I should not take the trouble the conquest of him is likely to give me, if the elegance of his manners, the superiority of his talents, and the strength of his feelings, did not render him a man, whom it would give me the highest gratification to see at my feet.”

“And to obtain this gratification, you have no hesitation in destroying his peace; for you cannot, surely, intend to marry him?”

“I certainly do not:—his situation does not suit me; but that is of little consequence to him; at his next quarters, he will find another mistress.”

“May he not in the interim, suffer much unhappiness, and perhaps miss another woman, with whom he might be happy?”

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,

“Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;

“Omitted,—all the after voyage of their life

“Is bound in shallows, and in miseries.”

“ I am not unconscious of this, and have therefore, always condemned men for being coquets; as the mischief they do, women have seldom time to repair: but how different is the lot of men! From sixteen to sixty, they have almost every blessing at command.”

“ Their coquetry may certainly oftener prove fatal; but either in man or woman, it is deplorable. What a woman you might be, Harriet, were it not for this failing! How it lowers you!”

“ There are many good women coquets, Louisa.”

“ There may be many who have some good qualities;—not *one* who is truly amiable, or has any pretensions to dignity of mind.—Can you forgive my saying so?”

“ I can:—because my inordinate love of admiration often sinks me with myself.”

“ The universal admiration you seek, sur-

prises me ; as you must certainly be aware, that the applause of weak or mean people, is more mortifying than flattering :—we seldom admire greatly the qualities which we have no perception of in ourselves.”

“ Yet nothing has contributed more to excite my love of general admiration, than the finding how little could be presumed on the approbation of a few. When I first emerged from our solitude, in Cornwall, I fancied a certain degree of admiration could never be excited, without sterling qualities ; and that if once I could attain a high place in one circle, I should be secure of it in every other ; but how greatly was I deceived !—I soon found there were few people so insignificant, as not to have their little knot of friends, by whom they were beloved and admired ;—few even, who could not boast of having met with extravagant eulogium.”

“ I can well believe it ; for I see that showy talents, or accidental advantages, often exalt people to a height, to which they have no real pretensions, while diamonds of the first magnitude lie unnoticed. Beauty in women

gives lustre to very moderate talents; and both in men and women, eloquence can give a most deceitful brilliancy."

"But without any real talents whatever, people will some times obtain extravagant praise;—for so various and numerous are the circumstances by which persons are guided in their judgment of others, that they often fancy qualities in individuals, which they do not possess; and thus it is not uncommon to see a man extolled by one person, and despised by another.—Nay, the very persons on whose admiration we fondly flatter ourselves to-day, will to-morrow change their opinion from seeing us in a new point of view."

"It requires indeed extraordinary merit to bear us triumphantly through every ordeal."

"You cannot imagine how shocking all this was to me, when, delighted with praise, I first plumed myself upon the admiration of individuals."

"With such views, how can you be so fond of admiration?"

“ I may love its effects, though I do not consider it as a test of merit. It is only with respect to very extraordinary persons, that this can be done safely. If you will show me a man whose talents are undisputed ; whose enemies, as well as friends,—foreigners, as well as countrymen, unite in praise of his superlative abilities ;—who, unsupported by power, can boast the affection, and enthusiastic admiration of numbers of enlightened men ; that man, I will say, may exult in his situation ! ”

“ How often, Harriet, have I occasion to admire the correctness of your memory ! You have repeated the very words, we heard Mr. Delwyn employ in conversation with Sir John Ornaville. ”

“ It is true ; the truth of them forcibly impressed me. Were I a man, such only is the situation which could gratify my love of admiration. Few indeed, can judge of their merit by the place they hold in society. How many, who now fancy themselves important, would be levelled with the dust, were their situation to depend on their personal merit ! ”

“ Self-esteem is the only source of approbation in which we cannot be mistaken, and if we attain it, we shall, to a certain degree at least, secure the esteem of others.”

“ By no means ;—for adverse circumstances often deprive people of the credit they deserve.”

“ It must frequently prove otherwise ; and self-approbation is at least the best support we can have against the injustice of others. The pursuit of admiration is most laborious and precarious ; a craving never to be satisfied, and liable to perpetual disappointment.”

“ Yet it is a gratification necessary to my existence.”

“ Would to heaven ! you could be as independent of it as Constantia Ormville. False praise she would reject, as you would return a letter addressed to you by mistake ; but even just commendation cannot elate her, because it is always inferior to the excellence to which she aspires. Neither can she be

mortified by unjust neglect ; as it is chiefly by her own consciousness of what is right or wrong in herself, that she can be exalted or degraded."

" Do you not see, that this way of appreciating herself, may lead to the greatest absurdity ?—' Our enemies in their judgment of us, come much nearer the truth, than we do ourselves.' "

" Yes, if we practise no self-examination ; but if we carefully reflect on our actions, and the motives of them,—if we compare our talents and acquirements with those of others, it is impossible we can form a very mistaken opinion of ourselves, unless we are uncommonly weak and vain ; even then, I declare, I have never seen an opinion engendered by self-love, more erroneous or extravagant, than the opinions often formed of individuals by their friends."

" It may be so,—but I am far enough from aiming at perfection : my faults are a part of myself, which I shall never find a way to get rid of."

“I wish you would at least not add to the list of your errors, the enslaving Valmonsor.”

“You are strangely concerned for him, Louisa :—Have you a fancy to him yourself?”

“No, but a great desire to save him from you.—Have you made any progress in the conquest of him?”

“My opinion is not decided upon that point. He has certainly thrown himself in my way in a very suspicious manner, but he is not a man whose views are easily penetrated. I have some times despaired of ever being able to make any impression on him, unless he were married.”

“What! would he then be more vulnerable?”

“He certainly might, though I do not say, that I should then try my power.”

“But, I should think he would be farther than ever out of it :—You are surely in jest?”

“Not at all; there are no men, who should

be so much afraid of coquets, as your very virtuous married men. The causes are obvious."

"What are they?"

"First, a woman can behave with greater ease and freedom to them than to others. Secondly, such men are not exposed to the company of licentious women, who aggravate the passions, and weaken the affections.— But the principal cause is the general misconduct of wives. Few think of pleasing the husband, as they gained the lover. They presume too much on their power before marriage, and a great deal too much on the influence of beauty, which at first is not less attractive than they suppose, but much less durable in its effects. It is chiefly of consequence by engaging the notice, and flattering the vanity of men, which puts it in the power of a woman to discover to advantage any merit she may happen to possess; but beauty alone has very little effect in winning the affections, and scarcely any in keeping them. However it may at first be admired, to be felt it must have accompaniments, which will

please without it, much better than it can please without them.

My love of admiration has led me to study, with the deepest attention, the means by which men are captivated, and I find it depends infinitely less on beauty, than on a pleasing expression of countenance, engaging manners, and a thousand nameless attractions, which cannot be defined. I have known beautiful women who were not beloved, and very plain ones who had numerous lovers. When a man is once in love, if his mistress is not so plain as to offend the eye of an indifferent spectator, it is of little consequence to him what her appearance is. He will probably think she has beauties, which no one else can discover; or he will believe that he likes her plain features better than he could do the most beautiful. Women, however, are seldom aware of this, and are indeed continually misled by what they hear of external appearance. It is always the first thing spoken of in women. Even in Courts of Justice, we often hear the beauty of a woman mentioned by her Counsel, as if he expected it would be considered as an aggravation of the injustice that had been done

her, or a circumstance to interest the Judge in her favour.—How entertaining it would be in a Court of Equity, to hear a man's being very tall, or very handsome, mentioned as an argument in favour of his cause!—But custom prevents our being struck with the absurdity and impropriety of this respecting women.

It is not then wonderful that our sex should mistake the influence of beauty, since their admirers are extremely deceived in it. I have often amused myself with trying its power, and have a hundred times brought men from the feet of a beauty to my own, by employing attractions that were more touching. Yet, if you had asked them, what they were captivated with in me, they would mention my appearance, as one of my principal charms; though in reality they had remained quite insensible to it, till I chose to employ a little address.—I have no beauty to boast of, yet there are few men whom I should fail of captivating if I wished it;—none perhaps, if their affections were not previously engaged.”

“Are not the affections of married men engaged?”

“ Attend, till I explain myself fully.— Though a man may be regardless of the want of beauty, he will not be indifferent about other defects. He will gradually grow tired of insipidity,—chagrined by folly ; cooled by indifference ; displeased by ill-temper, and disgusted by slovenliness ;—and how many of these things, pray, is it easy to be secure from in a wife?—My experience has convinced me, that neatness and cleanliness of person, house and furniture, are of more importance in preserving the love of a husband, than the finest set of features.

Before marriage, a man, in love, fancies his mistress every thing he can wish ;—after it, he too frequently discovers, among other defects, that, from want of cultivation of mind, she is no companion, and his high-raised hopes of happiness vanish in air. Some men do not perceive that their disappointment arises from the failings of the woman they have chosen to marry ; but fancy it proceeds from the unavoidable nature of things ; and though their love is gone, continue a regard for their wives from habit, dependence, fondness for their children, or the love of domestic life,

which is often mistaken for the love of a wife; but when a woman ceases to please her husband, it is not difficult for an agreeable female friend to convince him, that he could have been much happier with her.—Happily such agreeable friends are rare; and hence the safety of many married men.”

“Your reasoning is plausible.”

“It is more,—it is just. I am so much convinced of the danger married women run from female friends, that, when I marry, I am resolved never to have one in the house with me; not even you, Louisa, lest my husband in some unlucky hour, should discover that you are more amiable than me, and come insensibly to prefer you.”

“How did you acquire all this knowledge? —Oh, Harriet, Harriet!”

“Am I to blame, Louisa, for seeing things as they are?”

“No; if you did not learn your theory by practice.—Can humanity, can reason have no power over you?”

“Are you certain, Louisa, that your merit is superior to mine? Does virtue consist in resisting temptations, or in not feeling them? A philosopher has shown that our reason is strong in proportion as our passions are weak.—I have always thought your reason very strong.”

“Another philosopher, Harriet, has said, ‘The passions always justify themselves.’—But while I condemn your conduct, I cannot help admiring the candour of your confessions.”

“My merit in this is less than you suppose. I am sensible my actions must hurt me in your esteem, more than my words can do, and of neither will you ever make a bad use:—You are too good to do this; and were it otherwise, you would still respect yourself in your sister.”

CHAPTER XVI.

LOUISA found something to hope, and much to fear from her conversation with Harriet. It appeared that she did not presume on Valmonsor as a lover, but whether he was quite indifferent about her, or how long he might continue so were very dubious points. There was evidently something mysterious in their intercourse, for why had he met with her so often at B——'s, if she was indifferent to him, and meetings by appointment, so soon after her recovery, were still more alarming. Even supposing they might be owing to some accidental cause, could it be imagined that they would not be attended with dangerous consequences?

She therefore determined, that scarcely any thing should prevent her having a con-

versation with him immediately, and after pondering on the best means of obtaining it, she resolved she would the next day, accompany him on horseback, on his return to Ramsgate, if she should not have an opportunity of speaking to him before his departure. In this way she hoped to be secure of conversing with him, unless he was engaged to go elsewhere, or the weather should render riding impossible.

She told her sisters it was her intention to dine the next day with Mrs. Hanson, and gratified Harriet much by assuring her, that she would not leave Oak Hill till Valmonsor's visit was over. Miss Hargrave did not know of his first visit, and with Louisa's assistance, Harriet hoped she would not know of his second.

In the morning, the weather, though dry was so very gloomy, as to occasion much anxiety to Louisa, lest it should baffle her design. It continued tolerable, however, and about twelve o'clock, she seated herself at the

window, from which she had formerly seen Valmonsor appear, while Mrs. Abbot very opportunely occupied the attention of Miss Hargrave in another apartment.

In a very short time she saw him arrive; with a beating heart she heard him ascend the steps which led to Harriet's apartment,—and when she heard him enter it, and the door close upon him,—certain that he was again within the circle of her magic power, her heart sunk as if she had heard the signal of death.

“Gracious heaven!” she exclaimed, “may he this one day escape the power of Harriet, and, if he is worth preserving, never shall he again be in danger from her!—But my wishes may already be vain;—he comes, perhaps, willing to receive the fetters she is preparing for him; or should he yet be indifferent, he may, with such a woman, be in an instant irretrievably entangled!”

Long did the time he passed with Harriet, appear to Louisa,—but at length she heard

him coming down stairs, and again she met him as before, and invited him to accompany her to Miss Hargrave. He bowed assent, and followed her to the drawing-room, but just as she was about to open the door, the sound of voices induced him to ask, if he was not intruding upon her sister, when she was particularly engaged with company?

“ Before I answer your question,” replied Louisa, “ permit me to ask, if you are going directly from Oak Hill to Ramsgate?”

Being answered in the affirmative, she said, “ Then I will not desire you to see my sister at present, as she is engaged with a lady, who would be very insipid company to you ; and on my own account I do not regret it, as I am going to Ramsgate, and will accompany you thither.”

Without giving him time to reply, she went directly down stairs, ordered the horses to the door, and mounting quickly, from fear of interruption, was in a few minutes at a distance from the house.

“ This is my first excursion since my sister’s illness,” said Louisa, as she slackened her pace, upon getting into the high road: “ I have not even been at Ornvile. Pray, how has it happened that you have been almost as great a stranger there as myself ?”

Perceiving him at a loss to reply, she added, “ My friends have repeatedly spoken of your absence with much surprise and regret.”

“ I imagined,” replied Valmonsor, in a very embarrassed manner, “ that your friends were much engaged.”

“ Not more than usual,” said Louisa.

“ I thought,” said Valmonsor, in evident confusion, “ that Miss Ornvile, at least, had been much occupied. I did not, therefore, think it right to trouble her to fulfil an engagement she made with me to go to Willow-field.—She has been so much engaged, that I did not suppose she had any time to throw away upon me.”

“ I know not why,” replied Louisa, “ you should think so ; she never was so little from home as she has been since she made that engagement with you.”

“ Was she not engaged soon after in a tour of visits with Sir John and Lady Ornaville ?”

“ She was, but they were soon over, and did not prevent her being at home in the mornings.”

“ But she was, I—I presume, occupied in such a way at home, as would have rendered my visits troublesome ;—she must know, at least, why I did not wait upon her, as I sent her a message by your sister.”

“ I can assure you, that she has never received the least message from you, either by my sister, or any other person.”

Valmonsor looked surprised ; but, after a moment's pause, said, “ It is true, Miss Harriet's sudden illness might prevent her delivering it : Miss Ornaville, however, must be

sensible that I could have no reason to suppose she wished to remember her engagement with me."

"I cannot imagine what cause you could have to think so."

"A variety of circumstances led me to believe that she wished to get rid of it."

"Whatever they were, they have entirely deceived you."

"They were so strong, they left me not a doubt:—I even heard—I was led to believe—that is I understood——"

Louisa, suspecting he alluded to Harriet's information about Woodford, spared him the pain of farther explanation, by saying, "You have heard, perhaps, that she was going to be married to Lord Woodford, but there could not be a more erroneous report; Miss Orville has had no particular engagement whatever, and has been greatly surprised at your absence."

"Good God! cried Valmonsor in the

strongest agitation, “ is it possible I can have been mistaken !—Did you but know, Madam, the train of circumstances by which I have been guided, you could not be surprised that I should have fallen into error.”

The anxiety and perturbation visible in his behaviour from the beginning of the conversation, left Louisa no doubt of the state of his affections ; and his mention of Harriet, leaving her as little of his having been misled by her, she resolved to be explicit, that an end might be completely put to his, and Constantia’s uncertainty respecting each other.

“ I am not surprised, Sir,” resumed she, “ that you have been misled by erroneous accounts ; but to show you I cannot be mistaken about Woodford, I will acknowledge that he made his addresses to Miss Ornvillè unsuccessfully in May, and she has never seen him since. My sisters do not know this, nor was I told it by my friend, who would think it indelicate to him to make it known, but I cannot be mistaken, as I had my information from her mother.”

As Louisa said this, Valmonsor's countenance betrayed a variety of emotions:—he attempted to speak, but stopt abruptly, and it was some moments before he made the following reply.

“ My surprise, Madam, at all you tell me is unspeakable, while my consciousness of the light in which my conduct must have appeared to Miss Ornvile, overpowers me with sorrow and mortification. Nothing but a minute detail of the circumstances by which I have been deceived, can account for my behaviour, and if you will have the goodness to listen to it, and repeat what I say to Miss Ornvile, she may possibly permit me to appear before her, though I cannot be surprised, if she should never see me again.”

Louisa assured him she would listen with pleasure.

“ The last time,” resumed he, “ that I had the pleasure of speaking to Miss Ornvile of our excursion to Willowfield, I told her that I should return to Ornvile as soon as some

friends I had at Ramsgate left it, which I expected would be in three or four days. Next day however, I found they were to depart sooner, and meeting with your sister, who told me she was going to Ornvile, I begged of her to let Miss Ornvile know that I should be at the Abbey the next morning. At that time, my friends intended to set off before breakfast; but they suddenly changed their design, and were so late of departing that I did not get to Ornvile till near twelve o'clock. This was so much later than I ought to have been, that had I not sent Miss Ornvile a message, I should have delayed going till the next morning.

When I arrived, and found she was gone to spend the day at Oak Hill, in consequence of a message from your sister, without leaving any for me; I was extremely surprised, and disappointed: For I had so earnestly requested Miss Harriet to deliver my message, that I could not suppose she had neglected it.

On reflection, however, I imagined Miss Ornvile might have particular inducements to go to Oak Hill, and I determined to return to Ornvile the first morning the weather

was favourable for Willowfield. Two days passed without its being so; but as it was not so bad as to prevent your sister's coming to Ramsgate, I endeavoured to meet with her in the hope of receiving a message from your friend. I went to B——'s at the hour she usually called there, and found her among a crowd of people, which prevented my speaking to her particularly; but to my general inquiry about her friends at Ornaville, she replied they were so well, that she was going to dine with them, at Sir Thomas Vyner's, where they were to pass the night; and she believed it would be sometime before they were settled at home; as they were engaged on a tour of visits.

Upon hearing this, I thought it would be unnecessary to go immediately to Ornaville; but anxious to know when the family would return to it, I went to B——'s every day the weather would permit your sister to be in Ramsgate; and one morning, upon asking her if they were at the Abbey, a Lady who was present, said she knew they would be at home the next day; as Mrs. Oldfield

was engaged to take a family dinner with them.

Encouraged by this intelligence, I went the next day to Ornvile ; when, to my great mortification, I found Miss Ornvile had left it a few minutes before, with your sister. The missing her twice in this manner, struck me as having almost the appearance of a design to avoid me ; for, although I had not said to Miss Harriet, that I intended being at the Abbey, I thought she must have understood it. I imagined, however, that if my conjectures were mistaken, Miss Ornvile would certainly send me a message by your sister, who was so often at Ramsgate.

To receive this message, I again met Miss Harriet at B——s, and upon asking if she had mentioned to Miss Ornvile the inquiries I had been making ; she answered that she had ; and had likewise asked if she had any commands for me, as she saw me frequently in Ramsgate ;—to which Miss Ornvile replied, that she had *nothing* to say to me.

I will not, Madam, trouble you with my reflections on receiving this information ;

which would not, however, have prevented my making another attempt to see Miss Ornvile at the Abbey, had not your sister fixed a day for an excursion she had often talked of. I flattered myself that you and Miss Ornvile would be of the party; and I resolved to delay my visit to Ornvile, till it was over.

You know how my expectations were fulfilled.—I asked your sister, how it happened that neither you nor her cousin had been tempted to accompany her? She said that you disliked the excursion, she did not know why; and she had not proposed it to Miss Ornvile, because she did not believe it would be agreeable to her.

As I knew Miss Ornvile was fond of such excursions, I had little hesitation in concluding it was only my presence which prevented its being agreeable to her; and when your sister, in the same day, informed me, that she expected Miss Ornvile would soon be married to Lord Woodford, I then understood why she had not leisure to attend to me; and from that moment, thought it

would be wrong to trouble her with my visits.

The next day, I had the pleasure of seeing you at B——'s, where I came, at Miss Harriet's desire, with a copy of verses I had promised her. I wished to take that opportunity of requesting you to deliver a message to Miss Orville, but I was prevented from speaking to you, and therefore intreated your sister to let her know, that I had only been deterred from waiting upon her, by knowing how much she had been engaged; and that I supposed it would not now be agreeable to her to fulfil her engagement with me.

I thought it not impossible that she might send me an answer to this message, but I expected it in vain; and when, not long after, I saw her at the Abbey, the suspicions I had indulged were confirmed, by her taking no notice of it; nor even expressing any regret at having missed my former visits.—At meeting, she hardly deigned to address me; and at parting, was silent and reserved.—I was completely deceived by this train of circumstances; but how far they may justify my

conduct in your opinion, I dare not decide."

I cannot be surprised they influenced you," replied Louisa, "however I may regret their having impressed you so strongly: The first message you sent Miss Ornvill, she never received. Harriet did not go to the Abbey that day, as she intended; and next morning, left Oak Hill before Miss Ornvill came to it; who, though she had no expectation of seeing you for a day or two, would not leave home till it was past the hour she could expect you. The day you dined at Ornvill, she did not hear of your inquiries till after dinner; when Harriet mentioned them in the slightest way, and asked, indeed, if she had any commands for you; but what message could Miss Ornvill send to the man who appeared so neglectful of her? Your last message, she knows nothing of. my sister was taken ill before she had an opportunity of delivering it to her, and she never mentioned it to me. Thus has Miss Ornvill been innocently offending you, at the very moment she was keeping herself free from every engagement, upon your account:

and is it wonderful you should at length find her silent and reserved, when your behaviour appeared so extraordinary?"

"I am shocked by every circumstance you tell me;—I am humbled more than I can express."

"It is difficult to avoid being misled by appearances; but it is most dangerous to trust to any that are not unequivocal."

"I am but too sensible of it, yet so strongly have they operated against me, that it is not an hour ago, since your own behaviour strengthened my mistakes."

"How could I do so?"

"When suspicion is alive, you know, 'trifles light as air, are confirmation strong.' Miss Ornvile has frequently mentioned to me, the uncommon friendship which subsists between you and her, and I could not, therefore, help considering it as a proof of her disregard of me, that you should allow me to make two visits to your sister, without deigning to enter the room where I was."

“ I understood,” said Louisa, a little embarrassed, “ that you had business with my sister.”

“ I certainly had ; but none, which I could suppose, would prevent your joining us.”

“ It did indeed, as Harriet told me she wished to see you alone.”

“ It is very amiable in her,” replied Valmonsor, with an air of surprise, after a moment’s hesitation, “ to avoid even before you the display of her goodness ; but I must take the liberty of informing you of the occasion of my visits, as it can only do her honour, and I should wish every part of my conduct to be laid open to your view. The last time I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Harriet in Ramsgate, we met a poor woman in the street, with two children in her arms, in deplorable distress. Your sister gave her a trifle, and inquired her name and place of abode, with the intention of assisting her farther, which her illness prevented. When she recovered, she did not forget the poor woman, but she had forgot

her name, and wrote to me to inquire if I remembered it ; desiring me, at the same time, to employ for her use, if I found her deserving, five pounds, which she sent me inclosed. This is the business, upon which I have these two days had the honour to wait upon your sister."

" I am extremely sorry," returned Louisa, "that so many circumstances should have concurred to mislead you ; but they must now be remembered only so far, as they may guard against future mistakes."

" But dare I flatter myself they will not be remembered by your friend ?—Will she forgive my errors, when she knows my sorrow and contrition ?—Let me beseech you to tell her, that I am overwhelmed with shame and remorse."

" I shall faithfully repeat all that you have told me."

" May I ask you to plead for me, if you do not think me wholly unworthy of forgiveness?"

“ I fear I cannot entirely acquit you of error, but I shall most readily intercede for you.”

“ If you are so good as to interest yourself in my favour, I shall hope much from my advocate, though little from my cause.—How could I distrust Miss Ornvill!—How dare I hope she will forgive me?”

“ I trust she will grant her forgiveness, when she hears your vindication.”

“ When do you expect to see her ?

“ This day.—I am now going to Mr. Hanson’s, whence I shall go directly to Ornvill.”

“ May I presume to wait upon Miss Ornvill to-morrow, or must I wait to know my fate from you?”

“ I will venture to bid you wait on her without delay ; for I shall plead your cause so zealously, that I cannot doubt her verdict will be favourable.”

“ Whatever may be my demerit in other respects, my gratitude to you will be unbounded. Tell her I intreat you, that if she knew how much I have already suffered for my sins, her merciful disposition would remit farther punishment.”

“ You may safely confide in me.”

They were now at Ramsgate, where Valmonsor attended Louisa to the door of Mr. Hanson before he bid her adieu. She found Mrs. Hanson at home, with whom she remained only so long as was necessary to regret the delay her visit had met with, and to express her hope that it would soon take place, after which she immediately set out for Ornaville.”

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Louisa arrived at Ornaville, she found the family at dinner with a few visitors, one of whom was Mrs. Almorne. Her unexpected appearance excited surprise and pleasure, and she apologized for being so late, by saying she had been at Ramsgate.

Soon after the cloth was removed, she gave Constantia a hint that she wished to see her alone, and they withdrew to the apartment of the latter; where as soon as the door was shut, Louisa turned with a smiling countenance to her friend to communicate her joyful intelligence;—but hardly had she looked at the sad face of Constantia, when struck with an emotion of tenderness and pity, she clasped her in her arms, and burst into tears.

Constantia, who knew not how to interpret these opposite appearances, mingled her tears with Louisa's, without daring to inquire the cause;—but Louisa, at length, recovering herself, said, “Constantia, my dear, my beloved friend!—you will yet be happy.—I have seen Valmonsor!”

“You have seen him,” answered Constantia, mournfully.—“Alas! I tremble at the very sound of his name;—what may I not hear!”

“You will never hear any thing painful from me;—I will not be the messenger of bad news. Valmonsor's conduct has been owing to mistakes,—solely to mistakes, but they are over, and you will see him to-morrow.”

Constantia rested her head on Louisa without speaking; the paleness of her countenance showed how deeply she was affected.

Louisa wished her to recover a little before she told her more, and they had remained in this state a few minutes, when they were interrupted by Mrs. Almoré. She had ob-

served the cheerful appearance of Louisa, and imagining she was the harbinger of peace, came to know if her conjectures were right.

Her presence re-animated Constantia, who in a short time was able to listen to Louisa's recital of her conversation with Valmonsor.

When it was finished, Constantia continued in the attitude of listening without appearing to feel any satisfaction.

“ I hope, my dear,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ that you will now be easy.”

“ I am relieved,” replied Constantia ; “ but my spirits cannot immediately recover their tone. I tremble at seeing the precipice on which I stood, and am shocked to find on what slender threads my fate may hang ; I am mortified too, that Valmonsor should so easily have distrusted me :—he has been misled by the most trifling circumstances.”

“ Valmonsor has been imprudent,” said Mrs. Almorne ; “ but his errors are of a kind that can scarcely be avoided without experience.”

“ I have little experience to boast of, yet I have always endeavoured to put the most favourable interpretation on his conduct, and wished to give him an opportunity of justifying himself.”

“ You and Valmonsor have been very differently situated. His conduct by baffling conjecture, put it out of your power to form a decisive opinion of it, while the circumstances in which you were placed, did not expose you to humiliating fears; but he had not only to contend with the terror and jealousy natural to a lover, but with the diffidence arising from adverse fortune; and when under these circumstances a rival such as Woodford, was presented to his view, it is not wonderful, he became the dupe of his fears.”

“ If he had esteemed me as I wish, he could not have distrusted me after the pointed attentions I have shown him;—attentions which in his situation could only proceed from the most disinterested affection.”

“ No encouragement,” replied Mrs. Al-

more, “ can give some men confidence; their diffidence and jealousy are perpetually at work to create themselves disturbance, while others are hardly to be repulsed by the most forbidding behaviour. I have seen men of merit, of reserved and diffident tempers, lose ordinary women, merely from want of confidence to address them; and very inferior men obtain women to whom they had not the least pretensions, by their not having common sense enough to see that they ought not to aspire to them.”

“ You must also consider,” said Louisa, “ that though the circumstances which misled Valmonsor, appear trifling to you, they were very far from being so to him. Harriet’s character and connexion with you, made it impossible for him to distrust her, and it is obvious her conduct was the effect of the deepest design, although she was not aware of the extent of the injury she did you. The earnest manner in which Valmonsor sent his first message, suggested the necessity of separating you, and determined her not to deliver it, but to draw you from home the next morning, while her neglect of his request

would appear mere forgetfulness in consequence of your not meeting. With the same address she has managed all her proceedings, and left nothing undone to throw him at a distance from you, and attach him to herself. Though she is not uncharitable, I have no doubt the five pounds she sent the poor woman, were chiefly for the sake of interviews with him; money is nothing to her for such a purpose, though it might well make her afraid to let Prudence be present at their meetings."

"How much do I owe you, my dear Louisa, for your endeavours to save me from so terrible a rival? Would to heaven, I had as much cause to be pleased with Valmonsor, as with Louisa!"

"You must forgive Valmonsor's errors," said Mrs. Almorne, "which spring from the very nature of the passion. It is the misfortune of lovers to interpret every occurrence as applicable to themselves; they turn and twist things in such a manner, as renders it impossible for them not to be often deceived, even when the arts of a coquet do not assail

them ; and it requires more experience of life than Valmonsor has to boast of, to know how seldom mere appearances are to be trusted."

" Mean while," said Louisa, " till Valmonsor is wiser, will you give him a favourable reception, and pardon me for having encouraged him to expect it ? I could not avoid it, from the distress I saw him suffer ; had you seen him, your displeasure could not have continued."

A smile, and pressure of her hand, was the only answer returned by Constantia.

In the evening Louisa reluctantly took leave, and returned home, that Miss Hargrave's fancy might not be left at work to conjecture the cause of her sudden change of measures.

She told her sisters that on her arriving at Ramsgate, she found it would be unnecessary to make her visit to Mrs. Hanson immediately, and she had therefore postponed it, till it should prove more convenient.

Miss Hargrave contented herself with this explanation, and Harriet, who never troubled herself about small matters, and had no curiosity about Louisa's visit to Mrs. Hanson, was perfectly satisfied in knowing, that she had arranged her plans to her own satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE painful state of suspense Constantia had so long suffered, she now considered as over. Valmonsor's sorrow for his conduct would induce him to come to an eclaircissement, without waiting for so favourable an opportunity as he had formerly wished. She believed, indeed, it would hardly be possible for him to apologise for his behaviour, without explaining his sentiments, and imagined, if the weather should permit him to propose a walk to her, a very short conversation would suffice to terminate her anxieties.

But as the time drew near, in which she expected him to appear, the heavy clouds, which had been for some days presaging bad weather, began to pour forth torrents of rain,

and the winds conspiring at the same time to evince their power, the storm was so great that she despaired of seeing him. She did not suppose he would regard it upon his own account, but she feared he might be apprehensive of appearing capricious in the eyes of her father and mother, by coming in such weather after having been so long a stranger.

To prevent this in some degree, Mrs. Almorne at breakfast, mentioned in an easy way to Sir John and Lady Ornvile, Louisa's having seen him at Ramsgate, when he said it was his intention to be the next day at the Abbey; "But," added Mrs. Almorne, "I am afraid the weather will prevent him."

"A good soldier," replied Sir John, "cannot be afraid of a storm."

"I shall be sorry," returned Mrs. Almorne, "if he is disappointed; as I find different circumstances have lately prevented his being here so often as he wished."

"I hope," said Lady Ornvile, "he will

come; for he is very agreeable, and will enliven us."

Sir John and Lady Ornvile were thus prepared for his arrival to the great relief of Constantia, who had now only to wish that he might come;—and at the moment the wind and rain beat with such violence as to destroy all expectation of him, she had the satisfaction to see him appear.

He entered the room in evident concern and embarrassment; but a smile from Constantia diminished his anxiety; and the cordial reception he met with from the rest of the company, soon gave animation to his features, and contributed to restore his tranquillity."

"I am happy, sir," said Lady Ornvile, to see you at all times; but more especially in weather that renders the company of a friend more than ever desirable."

"I too," said Sir John, "am particularly glad to see Captain Valmonsor to-day; as it is a proof of his inclination to be with us."

“ I hope the weather,” added Mrs. Almorne, “ promises us so quiet a day, as will afford me an opportunity I have long wished for, of becoming acquainted with Captain Valmonsor.”

“ Such flattering testimonies of welcome,” replied Valmonsor, “ while they afford me high and peculiar satisfaction, almost overpower me with anxiety, lest I should be found unworthy of the reception with which I am honoured.”

“ It can only be Mrs. Almorne, who will be disappointed,” said Sir John; “ for we think ourselves already well acquainted with you.”

“ I believe myself secure from disappointment,” said Mrs. Almorne; but at all events, as I shall not make Captain Valmonsor my confessor, he will be in no danger of suffering mortification through me.”

“ May not a state of doubts and anxiety, be worse than the certainty of ills?” asked Valmonsor.”

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Almorne; “but on reflection, I believe you will not be exposed to this with me, though I should be silent;—there is a language more unequivocal than words.”

The moment she said this, the eyes of Valmonsor and Constantia were directed to each other; and the countenances of both sufficiently evinced the truth of her observation.

The conversation now became general, until Sir John was called out of the room, when Mrs. Almorne being engaged in conversation by Lady Ornvile, gave Valmonsor an opportunity of speaking to Constantia.

He began by asking if she had seen Miss Louisa Hargrave yesterday?

“I did,” replied Constantia, with an expressive smile.

“She promised,” said Valmonsor, “to plead for a criminal, who would deserve

no mercy, if his contrition were not as great as his guilt."

"She was a faithful friend to him; and, shall I own, she found some exertion of her eloquence necessary, I was so much mortified at the want of confidence in me which he had betrayed?"

"O!" cried Valmonsor eagerly; "speak not of want of confidence in you;—had it not been from diffidence of myself—from—"

Constantia seeing he stopt embarrassed, added, "A train of unlucky circumstances."

"Yes," replied he quickly; "a train of unlucky circumstances was certainly the chief cause; but—"

Again he hesitated, agitated and confused; and Constantia, anxious to spare him uneasiness, begged he would never think of the subject more, but let it be buried for ever in oblivion.

"That," said he, "is impossible; I can-

not forget my imprudence, to give it no harsher name;—and though you have the goodness to forgive me, I cannot forgive myself.”

“ Then,” replied Constantia, “ I shall retract the pardon I have granted; I can have no reward for the goodness you speak of, but the seeing it completely efficacious.”

“ But can I think of forgetting, what I ought so deeply to lament and condemn?”

“ I am so unwilling to indulge the thoughts of it a moment, that I intreat you will never again let it be the subject of our conversation, and you will truly oblige me by banishing it entirely from your remembrance.”

“ I cannot deny you any thing, else I should, in this instance at least, disobey you;—but how much am I indebted to you!”

“ Let us from this instant forget it; and now let me speak to you on a subject

which is agreeable and interesting to us both. Can you tell me any thing of Sir Esmond Anson?"

"Nothing; I have not heard of him since you saw him in June."

"I thought you corresponded with him."

"I do; but not regularly: and seldom when we are within a hundred miles of each other."

"I flattered myself you would be able to give us some intelligence of him; for we begin to be uneasy at his absence. He used to visit us frequently, especially at this season, but he has forsaken us entirely, and we cannot imagine the cause."

"He has probably been attending his uncle in a fit of the gout."

"We thought so till the other day, when Mrs. Almorne had a letter from Mr. Anson, who is in perfect health."

"Then I am wholly at a loss to account

for his absence, which I have been regretting extremely ”

“ It is the more extraordinary from your being in Ramsgate ; which, I imagined, would have secured us frequent visits from him.”

The return of Sir John interrupted the conversation, which they had no opportunity of renewing ; but Constantia had the pleasure of seeing that her father, mother, and Mrs. Almorne, appeared to converse with Valmonsor with increasing satisfaction.

From the whole of his behaviour, she felt herself assured that his affection had not been diminished by separation ; and that his happiness, in being restored to her, was not less than her own. His attention to her was unremitting, although he seemed devoted to her friends ;—his conversation was easy, animated, gay ;—yet she saw in his manner, every thing that was tender and respectful.

She was happy :—she wished nothing

different from what it was. The very weather, which in the morning had excited such troublesome fears, now heightened her satisfaction. It secured them from interruption, and gave peculiar zest to every thing in the house. She had never before seen a fine fire give such appearance of comfort;—the chairs and tables seemed more neat and convenient than usual; the rooms were of the most agreeable size; every thing was contrived in the very best manner; the world was without,—yet there was a world within!—How easy, thought Constantia, is it to be happy!

CHAPTER XIX.

V ALMONSOR left Ornvile the next morning, after breakfast, being obliged to return to Ramsgate on regimental business; but he did not go without promising to return speedily.

He had hardly departed, before Mrs. Almonne observed, that she had never seen a more agreeable man.

“In a military man of twenty-seven,” said Sir John, “such knowledge as he possesses, evinces great powers of mind, and steadiness of conduct.”

“No person,” said Lady Ornvile, “can

be insensible to his pleasing manners, and agreeable conversation."

"He appears fully to justify," observed Sir John, "the extraordinary encomiums bestowed on him by my nephew."

"Yes," replied Lady Ornaville, "and Sir Esmond's opinion may be trusted: young men have great opportunities of knowing one another."

"I have never seen a man," rejoined Sir John, "Sir Esmond himself excepted, whom I should so gladly receive for a son-in-law."

"I have great respect for Captain Valmonsor," said Lady Ornaville; but I cannot approve of your saying so before Constantia; he is certainly not a fit match for her."

"I cannot think myself guilty of any impropriety: I am certain she will not give him her hand without our consent; and if she should bestow her affections upon him without

consulting us, we have ourselves to blame for it.—We ought not to have encouraged his visits, if we had disapproved of him for her husband.”

“ Would you refuse the rights of hospitality to a stranger, and the friend of your nephew, because your daughter may happen to take a fancy to him?”

“ Certainly not ; but I should have thought it my duty, and it would have been easy to entertain him in my house, with little danger to her. I should not have desired him to come here whenever it was agreeable to him ; and when I thought it right to invite him, I should have sent her from home.”

“ All these precautions might have been of no avail ; neither bolts nor bars will prevent girls from making imprudent marriages ; and to be always vexing one’s self with the fear of what may never happen, would render life miserable.”

“ It is not always possible to guard girls

from imprudent marriages ; but many of them may be saved by proper care. In bolts and bars, I never had any trust. My first endeavour would be to inspire my daughter with sentiments that would lead her to make a proper choice ; my next, to keep her as much as possible, without seeming to intend it, out of the way of men I did not wish her to marry. Valmonsor was evidently a man that might be dangerous to a girl, who has shown that she is not desirous of rank or wealth."

" He is not at all a man that I should be afraid of ; he is not handsome, and if your nephew's character of him be just, he must be incapable of endeavouring to gain a young woman's affections improperly ; and if he does not court her, it is not to be supposed she will voluntarily seek him ; though she is not ambitious of wealth, she may certainly be afraid of poverty."

" Valmonsor's appearance may, perhaps, be reckoned plain ; but he is so very agreeable, that he may easily gain a woman's affections

without intending it; and were poverty the only objection to his marrying my daughter, it may be in my power to remove it."

"You would not certainly think of lessening the lustre of your family, to enrich Captain Valmonsor?"

"Not unless he were the husband of Constantia; for whose happiness I would do any thing in my power."

"Nothing you can do, without injury to your heir, can make him a proper match for her."

"My fortune is large."

"The dignity of your family requires to be highly supported."

"That I shall consider as far as is consistent with justice, and regard to the happiness of my children."

"I am sure Constantia's happiness is

deeply interested in the support of the Ornvile family."

"But my sons may die; the Ornvile estate will then devolve upon Lady Horndon, and would you choose her son to be in possession of an over-grown fortune, while Constantia lived in poverty?"

"I should be very sorry to see Constantia in poverty, and therefore I am for her marrying a man of fortune."

"But if she should prefer Valmonsor, don't you think I ought to give a part of my wealth, to make her happy with an excellent man, who happens to have none of his own?"

"Constantia must take care to place her affections properly;—she knows it is necessary for your heir to be rich, that he may inhabit this ancient structure with dignity, and preserve your name in a respectable manner."

“ Should Edward Horndon succeed to my estate, how will my name be preserved? Sir Robert is very fond of his name, and will not sacrifice it for his wife’s?”

“ He would have no occasion; his son would take both names.”

“ Yes; that is a device to which little folks, as well as great, have recourse for the preservation of their family consequence. We often see names thus tagged together, to the great joy of the possessors, and the public.”

“ You may smile as you please, but name is of very great consequence, though it is ridiculous for little people to be anxious about theirs;—but where is there a more ancient or honourable name than Ornaville?”

“ And who cares for the name of Ornaville?”

“ Don’t you?”

“ I did, when I was pleased with my sons,

and had a better opinion of the morals of the age, than I have now.—A man's name may, indeed, be preserved, but his blood is to be found, God knows where!"

"Well, well, it is needless to contest the point, or trouble ourselves about Constantia's marriage, before she thinks of it herself. I am sure she will behave properly; and she must be very sensible there are more objections to Captain Valmonsor than his want of fortune."

"What are they?"

"He has no connections."

"Then she will not be under the necessity of having disagreeable guests in her house."

"Pho!—I do not mean that he has no relations; but none that one knows any thing of: no connections of any name, or consequence."

“ How do you know ? ”

“ How can I doubt it ? — If he had any, we must have known it ; but whoever heard of the name of Valmonsor before ? ”

“ I believe there is not a combination of the letters, that is not to be found in a name. ”

“ Pho ! — What would her brothers say to such a marriage ? ”

“ They would have no title to say any thing, if her father and mother were pleased. ”

“ What would the world say ? ”

“ It does not signify what it would say ; it is with Valmonsor, not with the world, she would sit at her fireside. ”

“ That is a strange way of regarding public opinion. ”

“Be assured the public would take its tone from us. Valmonsor is a man of such merit, that if we disregard his want of fortune, the world would not whisper an objection; and if it did, it should be contemned.”

“I know not what to make of your opinions;—they become every day more extraordinary!”

“I hope it is because I grow every day wiser.—However, my dear,” added Sir John with a smile, “I will not trouble you longer on this subject; for it will certainly be time enough to discuss it seriously, when Constantia asks our permission to marry Valmonsor.”

Mrs. Almorne observing a pause in the conversation, took the opportunity to invite Lady Orville to a game of chess. She seldom joined in a conversation with Sir John and Lady Orville, when there was any opposition of sentiment between them;

but, as soon as it was over, endeavoured to banish the remembrance of it: and she was now anxious to prevent Lady Orville from indulging any fears respecting Valmonsor.

The proposal of chess was cheerfully agreed to, and Sir John withdrew to his library.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Mrs. Almorne retired to her apartment for the night, she desired Constantia to accompany her. She wished, she said, to have some conversation with her alone, and began by asking if she imagined her father had any knowledge of her attachment to Valmonsor?

“Yes,” replied Constantia, “though to what degree he suspects it, I am uncertain; but as I never attempted to conceal it, he probably sees it well.”

“Your disposition, my dear, is too artless to admit of disguise, and your principles too correct to make you wish to have any concealments from your father. From his con-

versation this morning, you will see that you are secure of his approbation."

"I do ; and my happiness would be complete, could I hope also for my mother's ; but I am under the greatest apprehensions on her account."

"Be not distressed about her, for means will be found to reconcile her to your marrying Valmonsor. It is to tell you this I now speak to you ; for I am unwilling that your happiness should be disturbed by fears about her."

"I know not to what means you can allude, but such assurances from you give me the greatest consolation."

"I cannot at present, fully explain my views, but I will give you some information that will afford you satisfaction."

At a very early period of your acquaintance with Valmonsor, your father observed the manner in which you distinguished him. Though your behaviour had been more re-

served, your partiality could hardly have escaped the knowledge of so careful and tender a father as yours. He saw it without disapprobation, he saw also that it was returned, and he has since watched the progress of your attachment, with all the solicitude of the most tender affection. The melancholy state you were in in summer, grieved him extremely, and he was only prevented from speaking to you of it himself, by the fear of adding to your distress, or influencing your conduct improperly. His reliance on your own discretion and goodness, with his high opinion of Valmonsor, made him think it better to leave you to yourself, than to risk biasing you dangerously in a point of such delicacy and importance. But he was likewise induced to this resolution, by the hope of my being able to give you all the consolation and advice you could require, without any of the disadvantages which might attend the interference of a parent.

The morning after my return from my tour, he informed me of your unhappiness, and requested I would engage you to confide in me. I told him I had already done so, and

gave him a faithful relation of the conversation we had had the preceding night. He approved of the advice I had given you, and entered entirely into my views. From the first discovery of your prepossession for Valmonsor, the idea of his quitting the army occurred to your father, and you can hardly imagine the satisfaction it gave him to find that Valmonsor might be expected to concur in his plans. He wished, however, that you should continue to think him ignorant of your situation, while you remained in a state of suspense, that you might not, on his account, suffer any concern or embarrassment. In the mean time, I have informed him of every thing that has occurred to you, and his anxiety of late, for the return and justification of Valmonsor, has not been inferior to your own."

"How blessed am I in a father!" cried Constantia; "his goodness and kindness affect me more than I can express."

"He is every thing, my love, that you could wish."

"Do you tell me all this at his desire?"

“ Not just at his desire ; but I had his permission to do so whenever I thought proper, and I wished to do it now, that you may both have the satisfaction of knowing it, and be the better prepared to relieve Valmonsor’s anxiety when he speaks to you on the subject. Your father’s conversation with your mother this morning was not premeditated, but he thought it a favourable opportunity to prepare her a little for an event, which he hopes will speedily take place, and in which, from a variety of causes, he has reason to expect her cheerful concurrence. One of these is the plan of life which he hopes Valmonsor will adopt. He wishes him to turn farmer, and live either in the Abbey, or near it. The first is his great wish. Separation from you, in any way, would be a heavy blow to the comfort of your parents ; but the having you with them for life, with the addition of such a companion as Valmonsor, would be the happiest event that could befall them. Your mother would soon be convinced, that no marriage you could have made, could be so conducive to your own happiness or hers. As the wife of Lord Woodford, you would

pass much of your time in town, and in the country would be environed by a crowd that would permit you to be little with her. She is not now so fond of promiscuous society, as she was, and will daily become more dependent on domestic comfort ; and while your residence with her, will complete the happiness of you both, it will also be the means of improving your finances. Your father intends to resign immediately to Valmonsor the fortune he designs you ; the interest of which being allowed to accumulate, while you are saved the expense of house-keeping, will amount, in all probability, before you can have the misfortune to lose your parents, to a very considerable sum."

"Can I believe that such domestic happiness is destined for me!—My wishes are accomplished beyond my most sanguine expectations, and my only fear is, that my felicity is too great to be real."

"Indulge no fears, my sweet friend, but enjoy your happiness while fortune smiles. I must leave you to-morrow ; but I shall ex-

pect to hear from you, when any thing new occurs. Need I say, the least circumstance which concerns you, is interesting to me?"

"How shall I express my gratitude for all your kindness! I have heard that love absorbed the heart in such a manner as to leave no room for other affections, but it has strengthened mine, and inspired me with greater tenderness for every human being than I had before."

"I fully believe it, though I am grieved to say it is not a common case; but I have always observed, that where love had a different effect, it was either because it operated upon a selfish character, or that the passions were more engaged, than the affections. 'There is but one true love, but there are a thousand copies of it.'"

CHAPTER XXI.

CONSTANTIA now enjoyed a degree of felicity rarely experienced ; every blessing of life seemed to await her, without any alloy to her happiness. Certain of her own felicity, her fancy busied itself in contriving the happiness of others, and her sanguine imagination anticipated a thousand joyful scenes in the society of those she loved.

She expected that Valmonsor would very soon return to Ornvile, and she was not disappointed. In a few days he came, when her father was taking his morning-ride, and she was sitting at work with her mother and Mrs. Oldfield.

The joy she felt on seeing him was a little damped by the gravity of his appearance, but as his manner, though serious, was unreserved,

she hoped his gravity was only owing to a temporary fit of anxiety which would soon wear off.

After he had conversed a short time with Lady Ornvile, he asked Constantia if she would do him the favour to take a walk?

She assented, and they immediately went out.

At length, thought Constantia, the wished-for moment is arrived, in which I shall have the happiness of offering him the rural abode he thinks so enviable,—an end will at last be put to all our anxieties.

She walked, impressed with this idea, while he led the way to a distant part of the Abbey.

He stopt when he came to a part of it he particularly admired. Here he stood in silence, and she leant on a fragment of the building. The variegated colouring of Autumn gave a melancholy appearance to the landscape, and the fallen leaves heightened the mournfulness of the ruins.

The countenance of Valmonsor from serious became sad, and every moment he seemed to grow more absent and melancholy. Constantia was struck with surprise and concern at his appearance, and watched his looks with the most anxious solicitude. She imagined his sadness proceeded from fear of the event of the conversation he meant to have with her, and waited impatiently for the moment in which he would put it in her power, to banish from his mind every trace of anxiety.

Awakening at length from his reverie, he asked if her father and mother went sometimes to town in winter?

“Never,” she replied; “they have not been in town for years.”

“And you very seldom leave them?”

“Hardly ever.”

“Do Mrs. Almorne and Miss Louisa Hargrave remain in Kent?”

“They do.”

“ May they be always near you! May you ever be cherished and protected by the dearest, the tenderest friends!”

Valmonsor's voice faltered as he said this, and Constantia, grieved and surprised at his manner, fixed an inquiring look upon him, but he averted his face, and suddenly advanced a short way from her.

Returning quickly, he insinuated an apology for his behaviour, by saying he was not in his usual spirits. “ I was melancholy, when I came abroad this morning,” continued he, “ and an incident occurred on the road, which disturbed me extremely. Lost in a reverie, I was walking my horse near a cottage, when a little boy, about two years of age, came running along, and fell before me. I did not recollect myself in time to prevent the fore feet of the horse going over him, but fortunately without doing him injury. The check I gave the horse, stopt him, till a man rescued the child. Had he moved a step, the boy would, in all probability, have been de-

stroyed, and I rendered miserable for ever.—The mother, who saw the accident, fainted; and it was long before she or her lovely child were restored to tranquillity. The poor little creature was dreadfully frightened, and his pale countenance rendered him so interesting, that I could not help clasping him a hundred times in my arms, and weeping over him. His mother was sooner composed than myself, and generously endeavoured to relieve my concern by blaming herself for permitting him to run in my way.—With what rapture did she clasp him to her breast!—Good God! how I envied her!”

Constantia sighed at this recital.

“You sigh Miss Ornvill, you sympathise in the mother’s feeling; your heart is formed for domestic enjoyments;—mine is but too capable of them, but,

“My fortune leads to traverse realms alone,
And find no spot of all the world my own.”

“Do not say so,” cried Constantia, “this cannot, will not be your fate.”

“ You know not, Miss Ornvile, what it is to be alone ; you have always been surrounded by objects of affection.”

“ Why should you be debarred from them ?”

“ Wherever I go, I am a stranger, and alone.—I have friends, it is true, who are interested for me ; but I see them only for an hour or a day ;—they are occupied with their own cares or pleasures, while I pass many heavy, very heavy hours in solitude.”

“ This will not always be your lot.”

“ Sometimes,” said Valmonsor, in a hesitating manner, “ I venture to indulge very flattering hopes.”

“ You must indulge them,—you will not be disappointed.”

“ Sometimes,” resumed he, after a pause, “ I fancy myself blessed in an object to whom my life would be devoted ; whose mere presence would be happiness,—and from whom

a look or word of affection would convey a transport, which may be understood, but can never be expressed!"

The appearance and manner of Valmonsor were so mournful, that Constantia felt herself deeply affected.

"Do you wish me such happiness, Miss Ornvile?"

"Most fervently, most anxiously do I wish it; may you have a wife, who if she is not all that you deserve, will at least equal you in tenderness,—who will think and feel the promotion of your happiness, the blessing of her life."

Valmonsor took hold of her hand as she said this, but instantly relinquishing it, a deep colour overspread his face, and was immediately succeeded by extreme paleness.

"Let us go," cried he quickly, "this place is too melancholy,"—and taking hold of her arm, he led her away, saying, "When you

visit this spot, Miss Ornvill, may you sometimes think of me."

Constantia, astonished and disappointed, looked at him earnestly, but he did not see her.

As they advanced towards the house, he lifted a pebble, and putting it in his pocket, said, "there is not a shrub or a stone at Ornvill, which is not dear to me.—Memory will soon be all I shall have left of happiness."

"Why, why," cried Constantia, eagerly, "do you talk in this manner? Has any thing happened to distress you?"

He made no answer, but quickened his steps.

"Will you not confide in me?" continued she; "perhaps it may be in my power—she stopt abruptly, ashamed of appearing to suppose his distresses could rest upon her.

"Much do I owe you," said he, after a moment's silence,—“much do I owe your

father and mother; I love and revere them, and to merit their esteem is one of the first objects of my life."

"You possess their esteem," said Constantia, emphatically,—“let me but see you well; you know not how very miserable you make me."

"Forgive me," said he earnestly, "I have done wrong, very wrong; I wished to see you to-day, anxiously wished it, but I have said nothing that I intended."

They were now at the house, which as he made no difficulty of entering, she flattered herself she should there be able to discover the cause of his unhappiness;—but no sooner was he in the room with Lady Orville, than approaching her hastily, he bid her farewell, and instantly quitted the apartment without looking at Constantia.

Struck with grief and amazement at his unaccountable behaviour, she stood for a minute immoveable, but suddenly roused to

recollection by voices in the room, she withdrew to her own apartment, where she threw herself into a chair, overwhelmed by sensations of so new and painful a nature, that it was sometime before she could be persuaded her recollection did not deceive her.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONSTANTIA remained lost in miserable, but vain conjectures on Valmonsor's extraordinary conduct, till the door was opened by Louisa Hargrave, who, advancing softly before Constantia was conscious she was in the room, took her kindly by the hand, and sat down by her without speaking.

Roused by her presence, Constantia returned the pressure of her hand, and asked how she had come so opportunely at a moment she stood much in need of her, but could little expect her.

“Anxiety about you,” replied Louisa, “brought me here; I knew what you would suffer on Valmonsor's leaving you.”

“How did you know he had been with me?”

“From himself; he came directly from Ornaville to Oak Hill.”

“From himself! could he tell you of his strange behaviour?”

“He told me only of the order he had received.”

“What order?”

“Don’t you know?”

“No, I know nothing; tell me, O! tell me quickly.”

“His regiment is ordered to leave Ramsgate.”

“Where, where does it go?”

“To Gibraltar.”

Constantia covered her face, but said nothing.

“ Do not, my dear friend,” said Louisa, “ suffer yourself to despond ; though he may be obliged to go, his absence will be short ; he will renounce the army the moment he knows the good fortune that awaits him.”

“ How will he know it ?” he will not suffer himself to be informed ; he might have said what he pleased to-day, but he seemed to have no intention of revealing his designs.”

“ He was unable to do it to-day, but he cannot go without doing it.”

“ I know not what to think.”

“ He will never leave you uncertain of his intentions. If he cannot speak to you, he will write, or confide in me. He seemed inclined to speak to me to-day, but had no opportunity.”

“ Tell me all that he said.”

“ After mentioning his approaching departure to my sisters before some visitors, he

added, in a low voice to me, that it had totally deranged his plans, and disappointed all his hopes."

"Why will he not tell me them explicitly? I am unable, Louisa, to support the torturing anxiety he so often occasions me. He seemed miserable to-day, and made me so, without giving the least hint of his departure."

"I see now his coming to Oak Hill, was merely that you might know of it by me."

"When does it take place?"

"He said soon: in a week I suppose; the order came the day he spent here."

"My fears are great."

"They will soon be over; he cannot leave you in suspense. You may trust to his own feeling and sense of propriety for this. His conversation with me to-day was interrupted by Harriet; but he promised to see us again,

when he will desire an opportunity of speaking to me alone. I will not leave you to-day, but to-morrow I shall go home to wait his return; and even though he should not intend to confide in me, it will not be difficult to lead him to do it."

"How sweetly consolatory is your sympathy, my ever kind Louisa."

CHAPTER XXIII.



WHEN Louisa left Ornvile in the morning, she went to Delvin Lodge to let Mrs. Almorne know of Valmonsor's intended departure, and to request she would go to the Abbey.

Mrs. Almorne was unluckily at a distance from home, but Louisa wrote a note to her, which she dispatched immediately.

She then went directly to Oak Hill, in the hope of seeing Valmonsor that day or the next, for although she did not expect he would leave Ramsgate for a week, yet as he said he would return to Oak Hill in a day or two, she thought anxiety about Constantia would hardly permit him to be later.

Two days, however, passed without his appearing, and they were passed in the most painful anxiety. Every time the door opened, she expected either to see or hear of him, for Constantia had promised to inform her, the moment she could give any intelligence of him.

It was late in the evening of the second day before Louisa was relieved from suspense. A note was then brought from Valmonsor, addressed to the Miss Hargraves, in which he bid them farewell, and intreated forgiveness for not doing it in person from the reluctance he felt to take leave, and the shortness of the time it would have been in his power to spend with them, being obliged to leave Ramsgate the next day.

This intelligence was a thunderstroke to Louisa, who, as she had received no message from the Abbey, was compelled to admit the belief that he meant to depart without coming to any explanation with Constantia.

She was extremely distressed at the idea of such conduct in Valmonsor, which she thought

so incompatible with the character and understanding she believed him to possess, that she still endeavoured to flatter herself his departure would not take place till late the next day; and that from particular views, or feelings, he wished to delay an eclaircissement with Constantia till the last hour.

This conjecture, however improbable, did not appear impossible, and to ascertain the truth of it, she went early in the morning to Mr. Hanson's, where she was soon informed that Valmonsor, with his regiment, had left Ramsgate at break of day.

She was now forced to relinquish the hopes she had cherished, though she found so much difficulty in doing so, that she yet wished to believe he had not gone without leaving a letter for her friend.

She had promised Constantia to return to Orville as soon as she knew of his departure, but she felt so unwilling to be the bearer of painful intelligence, that she resolved she

would first write to Mrs. Almorne, who she knew was at the Abbey.

“ This she did immediately, and after informing her of Valmonsor’s departure, apologised for not doing it in person, by saying, that she was afraid to see Constantia in the first moments of her disappointment, but would be at the Abbey in the course of the day.

This note she sent her servant with directly to Ornvile.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SINCE Louisa had been at Ornvile, Constantia had neither seen, nor heard of Valmonsor, and ceased any longer to expect that he meant to have any intercourse with herself before his departure; but she waited for intelligence from Louisa, before she would finally resign hopes of his having some conversation with her.

When Mrs. Almorne received Louisa's note, she was sitting with Lady Ornvile and Constantia. The latter, who saw the hand of Louisa, anxiously watched the countenance of Mrs. Almorne, while she read it; and as soon as it was perused, rose, without speaking, and quitted the room.

In a minute, Mrs. Almorne followed, and found her walking in her apartment.

The moment she entered, Constantia said, "I saw from your countenance what I had to expect;—he is gone!—gone without any explanation!—Left me in doubt, and in misery!—Oh! how cruel!"

She turned quickly from Mrs. Almorne, and throwing herself into a chair, hid her face.

Mrs. Almorne suffered her to remain a few moments in this state, and then, in the tenderest manner, intreated her to beware of blaming Valmonsor rashly, as he was, perhaps, more to be pitied than herself.

"Impossible!" cried Constantia; "it is impossible! Had he suffered the torture from uncertainty that I do, he must have put an end to it.—Ungenerous man! Is there a pain from which I would not anxiously have preserved him?"

“ I am persuaded,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ that he is much to be pitied.”

“ No ;—he is happy : happy, compared with me ! He may suffer my sorrow, my fears, and disappointments, but he cannot be condemned to suffer my suspense !”

“ I lament,” said Mrs. Almorne, “ and I disapprove his conduct ; it is extremely ill-judged ; but still I am persuaded he is acting from principle. The distress he discovered in his last meeting with you, shows, that even for his own sake, he would not have left you in suspense, had he not been induced to it by the strongest motives. What these may be, our ignorance of his situation makes it impossible to say ; but from his character, I cannot have a doubt that he has acted from judgment, in opposition to feeling.”

“ How mistaken must that judgment be, which could lead him to act in such a manner ! He knows little of human nature, if he does not know, that feelings once powerfully repelled, may never again recover their

tone;—if the pleasure of affection is diminished, the strength of it insensibly decays.”

“ But may he not hope, that pity for his distress, will prevent your displeasure, and preserve to him all the tenderness of your affection?”

“ How can I feel pity for him, who has none for me? There is a feeling to which he should never have exposed me,—the pain of humiliation.——He knows that he possesses my affections—my whole behaviour has declared it to him—yet he leaves me to feel all the misery of my dependent state!—Had I trifled with his affection, he could have obliged me to an avowal of my sentiments: but what is in the power of a woman?—If she does not relinquish her lover, is she not condemned to suffer all the wretchedness of suspense, as long as he shall be pleased to inflict it?”

“ Valmonsor has, at least, one apology to offer for his conduct, which many, who act

in a similar manner, have not;—he never endeavoured to gain your affection.”

“ Never; he did not even pay me those compliments and frivolous attentions, which silly men are so full of; but this behaviour strengthened my regard, and made me more willingly discover it. After the proofs of disinterested affection I have shown him, had I not a claim on his generosity?”

“ A great one; and I am convinced he he thinks so: he only differs from you about the means of showing his gratitude. He certainly intended to act differently, but his unexpected removal deranged his plans, and made him think it proper for the present to leave you at liberty.”

“ At liberty! Is it giving liberty to a poor bird, to open its cage, and bid it fly when deprived of its wings?”

“ My dear Constantia, when I plead thus for Valmonsor, do not imagine I am blind to his errors, or seek to palliate them, merely

to alleviate your distress. I think his conduct wrong; and though I am in general an enemy to avowed engagements between young people, I am still a greater to those tacit ones, which expose a woman to almost all the evils of the other, without its advantages. Although Valmonsor did not endeavour to gain your affection, he certainly acted for some time under the conviction of having gained it; after which, nothing should have prevented his making you a full acknowledgment of his views and situation. Women should never be left uncertain how to act in such important concerns; for a few years generally determine their fate, and their happiness may be for ever wrecked by one unfortunate disappointment.

He has acted on principles, which, though not uncommon, are, in my opinion, extremely mistaken. He imagines your interest safe, while you are not verbally engaged to him; but the suspense he has left you in, may be as fatal to your peace, as any promises you could have made; since he ought to be sensible, that if you deserve

his esteem, your affection must be of a steady nature. A positive engagement is so far preferable, as it may enable you to wait a happier period with more hope; allow you, in the mean while, to fortify your mind against the difficulties you have to expect; and in the event of disappointment, may leave you at least the consolation of having acted with your own approbation, and deserved the esteem of your lover by fidelity: a state of suspense is at once the foe of peace, and of fortitude."

"Yet for his sake, I should patiently have submitted to any suffering that did not involve him in blame; but how can I pardon him for aggravating the misery of separation, by disappointing expectations which he himself had raised, and could easily have realized?"

"Valmonsor's error now, as formerly, proceeds from being too much guided by appearances. He thought it impossible your friends could at once consent to your union with him, and he was disappointed of the

leisure he expected, for bringing them to his views. Some part of Harriet Hargrave's representations he must have thought just; and they have, probably, had a share in influencing his conduct."

"Too probably; how easy is it to do mischief, and how extensive may be its effects!"

"I regret now, that your father did not call upon him yesterday, as he proposed; a word, or look from him, would have saved all this unhappiness; but we trusted too much to Valmonsor, and yielded too easily to your objections."

"Do not regret your compliance with my wishes; I should have been miserable in my father's taking a step that might have had the appearance of soliciting pity for his daughter."

"Your father would have done nothing to lessen your respectability, yet might have been able to give Valmonsor the necessary

encouragement. You have justly regretted the conversation which your brother had before him with Sir Thomas Vyner; and it is very possible, that conversation has decided his conduct. There can be no doubt that fear of the disapprobation of your family sealed his lips; though, perhaps, he likewise feared that your affection might not enable you to disregard the hardships, which his sudden removal would immediately expose you to in an union with him."

"Alas! he little knows me, if he imagines any thing but his own misconduct could make me shrink from encountering difficulties with him. If he does nothing to forfeit my esteem, the Universe could not shake my attachment to him."

"But he must be very far from supposing this. Your sentiments and strength of affection are so uncommon, that they can only be imagined by those who are well acquainted with you. But this is a farther proof of the imprudence of his conduct. He has deprived himself of the means of knowing your cha-

racter and situation ; the knowledge of which would remove those apprehensions, which now probably involve him in affliction. The avoiding an eclaireissement in such cases, may be productive of the most fatal effects."

" How patient you are with me, and how much am I obliged to you, for thus endeavouring to allay the ferment of my mind."

" Let me have the satisfaction of seeing it allayed, and my reward will be great."

" Ought I to grieve, when possessed of such friends !—Why is not Louisa here ?"

" She was afraid to see you."

" Afraid ! how mortifying ! She has been a million of times more unhappy than myself, yet no one ever heard her complain. I must learn from her the virtue of resignation."

CHAPTER XXV.

LOUISA came to Ornvile a few hours after her note had been received; and on meeting with Constantia, clasped her in her arms, and melted into tears.

Constantia was much affected by her kindness; and it was some time before either of them spoke.—Constantia was the first to break silence; saying, “How sweet is your tenderness, my dear friend! but how much do I sink in my own esteem, when I compare myself with you! You are a mirror, Louisa, which represents me in a form that is afflicting: in the most painful situations, you are all patience and goodness, while my feelings, under much lighter trials, are as tempestuous as the winds.”

“Do not,” replied Louisa, “thus unjustly lower yourself, and exalt me; it is the difference of situation alone, that renders me more patient in affliction than you.”

“Seek not,” returned Constantia, “by depreciating your own merit, to reconcile me to myself; I see and feel the difference between us, which humbles, while it corrects me.”

“Reflect calmly, my dear Constantia, on our situations, and you will find, that from them alone arises the difference you speak of: for you are, in every thing, my superior; and to you I am indebted for any little virtue I may have.”

“Is it possible Louisa can flatter?”

“I do not flatter. The native excellence of your disposition, led you naturally into the paths which your parents, Lady Anson, and Mrs. Almorne, wished you to pursue; encouraged and protected by them, your character strengthened daily; and you dis-

covered, with openness and energy, the feelings of your heart. I, on the contrary, attained the age of nineteen with little instruction; and was often obliged to restrain or conceal my feelings, without knowing well whether they were right or wrong. When I came to Oak Hill, I saw in you an example of the influence of mind, on character and happiness. You were never at a loss what conduct to pursue;—instructed by the friends you loved and respected, the road you were to take, lay open before you; and if at any time it opposed your inclination, the pleasure you found in complying with their wishes, rendered the sacrifice of your own easy.

I was charmed with your happiness, while my heart was won by your kindness;—I listened with delight to your conversation, adopted your views, engaged in your pursuits, and gradually became what I now am.”

“ You would have been,” interrupted Constantia, “ what you now are, though you had never met with me: you are indebted only to the excellence of your own disposition and understanding.”

“ In your situation,” said Louisa, “ it is impossible that you can imagine how difficult it is to break strong habits, and overcome early prejudices ; or how very long we may wander erroneously, without a suspicion we are wrong. When we first met, many of your sentiments were unintelligible to me ; you spoke a language I could not comprehend, and it required all your engaging qualities to inspire me with distrust of my own opinions. By degrees, however, you opened my eyes so completely, that I became astonished at my former blindness, and but too conscious that had it not been for you, it would always have continued. I should have pursued my usual course, or perhaps through the influence of Harriet have fallen into a worse :—But the more I improved under your auspices, the less I was happy with my sisters, and though without connexions, that could be supposed to trouble or control me, I was perpetually subjected to authority, and exposed to vexation. By being obliged to conceal, I was at length taught to subdue my feelings,—the powers of my mind were blunted, and the natural force of my character so weakened,

that what you supposed the virtue of resignation, was merely the habit of submission.

How differently you have been situated, it is unnecessary to say; your very attachment to Valmonsor has been strengthened by reason, and the approbation of your friends; and if under such circumstances you did not feel strongly the disappointment you have met with, you would show yourself incapable of that strength of affection, which is the boast, and the blessing of humanity."

"My dear Louisa," replied Constantia, "you would not suffer me to interrupt you, or I should much sooner have told you, that your virtue in forming yourself what you thought right, without the solicitation of others, and in spite of the difficulties you had to contend with, is infinitely greater than mine. To have acted otherwise than I have done, with the instruction I have had, would have been criminal, but you have been guided by the love of virtue alone."

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN the evening, a servant from Oak Hill brought Louisa a note from a Mr. Comyns, requesting permission to wait upon her for a few minutes the following morning, as he was intrusted with the delivery of a message to her from a friend.

Louisa was a stranger to Mr. Comyns, whose note was dated Ramsgate, but being brought from Oak Hill, she inquired of the servant how he had received it? She was told, the gentleman who sent it, had called at Oak Hill, about half an hour after her departure in the morning, and again at four o'clock, but finding her return home uncertain, had left the note, and begged it might be sent to her.

She answered it immediately, and requested to see Mr. Comyns at Ornvillle any time the next day that was convenient for him.

It instantly struck her that the message he had to deliver was from Valmonsor, and she communicated her conjecture to Mrs. Al-morne, who thought it highly probable; but they concealed their expectations from Constantia, lest they might be disappointed.

The next morning Mr. Comyns came to Ornvillle, and delivered to Louisa a letter from Valmonsor, whose anxiety for its safety, Mr. Comyns said, was so great, that he would not hazard it in the hands of a servant.

Louisa expressed regret for the trouble her absence from Oak Hill had occasioned Mr. Comyns, and politely invited him to favour her and her sisters with a visit, after which he took leave.

With eager haste she broke open Valmon-sor's letter, and read the following lines.

“ Dear Madam,

“ The last time I had the pleasure of seeing
“ you, I trusted that I should once more
“ have that consolation before my departure;
“ but I now find myself unable to see you, or to
“ take leave of your friend. I intreat forgiveness,—and that you will not think hardly of
“ the man, who is thus compelled to leave what
“ is ‘ dearer to him, than are the ruddy drops
“ that visit his sad heart.’

“ May I request the favour of you to make
“ my apology to Sir John and Lady Orville
“ for not bidding them farewell? I shall carry
“ with me the most grateful sense of their kindness, and the hope, that it may one day be in
“ my power to evince it.

“ I am, with the highest respect,

“ Dear Madam,

“ Your devoted servant,

“ HENRY VALMONSOR.”

This letter, though it did not gratify the wishes, lessened the unhappiness of Louisa.

It contained at least, such acknowledgments, as she hoped would afford some balm to the wounded spirit of her friend.

She was not disappointed ;—it had a considerable effect in mitigating her distress. So open an avowal of affection soothed her pride, while it gratified her heart, and she began to feel that concern for him to which Mrs. Almorne believed him entitled. Still her grief was great, and her total ignorance of his views deprived her of a resting point on which she could lean for comfort.

Her father, who was regularly informed by Mrs. Almorne of every thing that occurred to her, was deeply affected by the departure of Valmonsor. Although he entertained the same opinion of his conduct that Mrs. Almorne did, and believed he must have some plan in view for the promotion of his union with Constantia, which a little time would discover ; yet he felt their separation severely, not only on account of the immediate distress it occasioned, but from the fears arising from the precarious state of a soldier.

“I have been devising,” said he to Mrs. Almorne, “various means for the speedy recall of Valmonsor. On the fate of a soldier no reliance can be placed, and we cannot too quickly remove him from the army. It has occurred to me, that Sir Esmond Anson may be able to serve us essentially. I can hardly imagine that Valmonsor will leave England, without securing some means of intelligence about Constantia: this means will probably be Sir Esmond; and I should think it may be easy for him to bring Valmonsor to an explanation of his views, without committing any impropriety.”

“The same idea has occurred to me,” replied Mrs. Almorne; “and I have no doubt it will be in Sir Esmond’s power to accomplish our wishes properly. I have lately had a pressing invitation from Mr. Anson to come to town about some business, and I shall therefore soon have an opportunity of speaking to Sir Esmond on the subject.”

“If Mr. Anson wishes to see you, I cannot object to your leaving us; otherwise I should prefer bringing Sir Esmond here.”

“ I am afraid he is not quite at leisure to come. It is on his account, his uncle wishes to see me ; and from his letter, I suspect that Sir Esmond has got into some entanglement which requires management.”

“ I am extremely sorry to hear it ; but it does not surprise me, for his unaccountable absence has made me very uneasy about him.”

“ I hope you have little cause for uneasiness ; Mr. Anson’s letter is not written in a desponding style : there may be embarrassment without distress.”

“ I wish it may be so. When do you propose going.”

“ In a day or two. I should have gone last week, had not anxiety about Constantia, prevented me ; the sooner I go now, it will be the better for both.”

“ Happy might it have been, if they had bestowed their affections upon each other ;

but they were too much accustomed to meet as brother and sister, to think of a nearer connexion."

"It might have been happy for Sir Esmond, but I do not think Constantia could have made a more fortunate choice than Valmonsor; we have only to regret the unhappiness she may suffer before his return."

"And that unhappiness is so great, I know not how to alleviate it. I have been attempting, by various little acts of kindness, to engage her attention, and draw her from her melancholy thoughts; but my endeavours have had an effect the very contrary of my wishes. Her mind, softened by the tender nature of her sorrow, is overpowered by kindness; and I am hardly less affected by her grief, than by the keen effusions of her grateful heart.—They destroy both herself and me; and forbid my showing her those marks of affection, which it is the delight of my life to bestow upon her."

"I hope a short time will enable her to

bear with more composure, the happiness she ever experiences in receiving any proof of affection from you."

"I hope it will be so; and I am sure it would, if she knew how much it afflicts me to see her distressed: for with all her tenderness, she is capable of great firmness, and uniformly prefers the happiness of others to her own. The most disgusting feature of mankind, is their selfishness; it is often discoverable even in characters that are apparently irreproachable; but from this stain, my sweet child seems to be entirely free."

"Benevolence is, indeed, a prominent excellence in her disposition. It is not necessary for her to be connected with a person, or a witness of distress, before she can sympathise in misfortune; I have seen her mourn the afflictions of many she never saw, more than the generality of people do those of their dearest friends."

"Had I considered properly the condition of a soldier, she would not now have been

mourning for her own. Valmonsor would never have left her, had I discovered to him, as I might easily have done without any apparent design, how little I should regard rank or fortune in my choice of a husband for her. But these reproaches are now vain."

"And they are unjust. In the early period of your acquaintance with him, had you given such encouragement, you might never have been assured of his disinterested affection for your daughter; and of late he has not put it in your power. You have no cause for self-reproach; and let us now hope, that, since it is in our power to recal him by Sir Esmond, we shall quickly see him return."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. ALMORNE was within a few hours of her departure for London, when she received a letter from Sir Esmond Anson, informing her, that his uncle had been attacked by a severe fit of the gout, which obliged him to decline the favour of a visit from her till he was better.

This was a great disappointment to her and Sir John, whose anxiety about Valmonsor made them reluctantly delay the meeting with Sir Esmond, and they resolved if Mr. Anson did not speedily get better, that she should go to town without waiting for his recovery.

Mrs. Almorne did not inform Constantia of her intentions respecting Sir Esmond, but mentioned her hope of hearing of Valmonsor by means of him, as it was probable they

would correspond, and even that he would make Sir Esmond acquainted with his plans. On her journey to town being postponed, she endeavoured to reconcile her to the delay by assuring her it would be short, and that she had little doubt of being able to obtain some intelligence of Valmonsor the moment she could meet with Sir Esmond.

Constantia expressed much gratitude to Mrs. Almorne for her unremitting attention to her comfort, but said she felt no disappointment from the delay of her journey, as she had been too often mistaken in well-founded hopes, to derive any consolation from precarious expectations, and did not think it probable that Valmonsor would communicate to Sir Esmond views respecting her, which he had not thought proper to reveal to herself.

Mrs. Almorne said she could not help thinking that Valmonsor might wish to consult him, as she had no doubt he must have some design in view with regard to her, and therefore, hoped she would in the mean while act with firmness.

Constantia assured her, it should be her earnest endeavour to conduct herself as she wished.

“I should be very sorry, my dear,” said Mrs. Almoré, “to refuse any indulgence to your feelings, which would not be injurious to your peace, but I am anxious to temper, at least, your unhappiness for the sake of your father, as well as yourself: I fear you do not always behave before him with the firmness you could wish.”

“It is too true,” replied Constantia; “but it is more owing to my father’s goodness, than to my weakness. In the happiest moments of my life, his kindness had always an irresistible power over me; how then can I now see him compassionating my grief,—indulging my weakness, and contriving, by every attention in his power, to steal me from myself, without being overcome by his goodness!—without being melted by that divine spirit of benevolence, which so peculiarly distinguishes him!—A single word,—a look from my Father can seize every avenue to my soul, and over-

power me with feelings of admiration, gratitude, and affection !”

“ Who, my dear, could wish to control such emotions as yours ?”

“ I will, if it be necessary. If I distress my father, I will govern my feelings before him. —For my mother’s sake too, I must appear well ; she fears I am ill, though she does not suspect the cause, and her kind solicitude must not be exerted in vain. I shall never pretend to say what I may not feel, but what I conceive to be my duty, it shall be my unceasing endeavour to perform. If you even think I ought now to resign Valmonsor, I shall do every thing in my power to overcome my affection for him.”

“ I am very far from wishing it ; independent of my hope of his speedy return, I would not at present advise the attempt. Your affection is too strong and well-placed, to be easily shaken, and can only, perhaps, be weakened by time. The course of events may lessen or destroy it, without any effort on your part ; but now, the attempt would

be painful and unavailing, while it would deprive you of the pleasure arising from so delightful an affection."

"Of late I have not found it delightful. At first it gave a new and inexpressible charm to existence,—the world was elysium, and I the happiest of human beings, even in Valmonsor's absence;—but that was soon over. I have heard, indeed, that, 'There is in love a power, which draws a transport even from distresses.' But I have been very far from experiencing this, and would not again go through the anguish I have suffered for Valmonsor, for any happiness the world can offer."

"How strongly you feel!"

"It is not our separation that is so painful. To that I could have submitted patiently, if the manner of it had been less distressing. My grief would have been deep, but silent; there would have been no violence in my feelings, because there would have been no gall in them. I think I could suffer patiently any misfortune in a good cause, but in all my dis-

tresfess with Valmonsor, I have always had the misfortune to be dissatisfied either with him or myself. I sunk under the reflection that I had courted him, more than he did me. Had he not sent that little note to Louisa, the wound his departure gave, would have been incurable: there are some feelings against which the mind must ever revolt."

"But since he did send it, let it compose your troubled spirit. I fear you read it too often; it is always in your hand, when I find you alone."

"I acknowledge I have read it innumerable times, that it might reconcile me to myself;—though I own it has otherwise a magic power; I trace every letter written by his hand as if it could tell me volumes."

"Read it then, but forget what is unpleasant, and look forward with hope."

"I might, perhaps, if I were not anxious for his safety. When he was here, my fears were lulled by the hope of his soon quitting his profession, but now I think what dangers he may encounter!"

“Gibraltar is not a dangerous station; I have no fears for him.”

“I wish I could banish mine. How often have I envied that man’s wife!”

“What man?”

“The gardener; don’t you see him at work from the window? His wife does not see in his profession,

All that Misery’s hand bestows,
To fill the cat’logue of human woes.”

“And to escape the evils of a soldier’s life, you would descend to her station?”

“Descend!—I should think it a blest alternative. Whoever has felt the horror of war that I do, would think it no sacrifice.”

“I trust you will never be a soldier’s wife.”

“I begin to doubt if I could be happy as a wife at all. Were I married to Valmonsor, I should be in constant dread of losing his affection. There is but one event which could make me marry him without hesitation,—his

suffering materially from the hardships of war.”

“ Such sentiments are to be expected from you ; and the more he was a sufferer, the more unamiable I should think it in you, to forsake him.”

“ I wish I could be his Sylph.”

“ His Sylph !”

“ Yes,—to be always near him ; to see him, and guard him invisibly is the happiness I desire.”

“ And if you should see his affections in the possession of another ?”

“ I should die.”

“ I see that love will render you either a very happy, or a very miserable woman : You cannot know a medium.”

“ I fear it ; but it is only to you I would speak thus : not even to Louisa, for she is too unfortunate to be the fit confidant of such sentiments.”

“A fit confidant for you is hardly to be met with. Love is a passion which is seldom well understood, but when it is felt; many people are wholly incapable of true love, and even those, who have felt its power, forget it in some degree, as soon as they cease to be under its influence, and rarely sympathise in the miseries of love, as they do in the other afflictions of mankind.”

“How different you are from others! You sympathise in the misfortunes of every human being, as if you were yourself suffering from them.”

“A very tenacious memory enables me to do so; I remember as if I yet felt almost every past impression; and well may I sympathise in your anxieties, since they bear a striking resemblance to what my own were before marriage.”

“I have often earnestly wished to know the history of your life, but fear the recital would be too distressing.”

“ It would be distressing :—For,

“ Of joys departed never to return,

“ How painful the remembrance!”—

Yet, as I never forget them, I shall suffer less from the recital than you may imagine. There is, however, nothing uncommon in my life; its similarity to your own is all that can render it interesting.”

“ It would gratify me extremely to know it.”

“ If it can suspend your sorrow, or be otherwise beneficial, I shall be amply recompensed for any pain the relation may occasion me. Comparison of ills is of much use in softening affliction; and, perhaps, you may find, in the distresses of my life, the means of alleviating your own.

But it is not here I can enter on the recital; it is only in the solitude and security of my own house, I could attempt it. Let us go to Delvin Lodge, and there, secure from interruption, I shall particularly relate to you those occurrences of my life, which bear any analogy to your own.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.



THE following day Mrs. Almorne carried Constantia to Delvin Lodge, where as soon as they were quietly seated by the fire-side, she thus began.

“ My story is very simple : it is a history of feeling, rather than of incident. I have suffered few of the calamities of life, and have known most of its blessings ; I am still in possession of many of them, yet my heart is ever sad. We form a very false estimate of the happiness or misery of individuals, when we judge of them by the number, or even nature of the blessings and misfortunes they have experienced. In some situations, one affliction will balance many comforts ; in others, a single blessing will compensate numerous

evils ; and in all cases, happiness depends so much upon the mind, that it is only by the quantum of pain or pleasure actually felt, we can properly judge of the fate of individuals. We may sometimes pretend to say how they should, but very seldom what they do feel.

My father was the younger son of a gentleman of family and fortune in Ireland. At an early age he was placed in the army, in which he continued till his death. When he was about thirty, his regiment was quartered in Scotland, where he became acquainted with, and married my mother. Their marriage was an union of affection, and proved a happy one. They continued tenderly attached to each other, were fond of their children, and contented with their lot. Of their family, three only survived childhood ; a son who was older, and a daughter, who was two years younger than myself.

Till I was eighteen, I was a stranger to distress. At that period, I had the misfortune to lose my sister, who died of a consumption after a few months illness. I loved her with the most tender affection, and was inconsolable for her death. My grief was so deep

and steady, that my parents became apprehensive for my health, and determined to remove me from a scene, where every thing I saw nourished my affliction. With much difficulty they prevailed on me to leave them, and go to Ireland to a sister of my father's who wished to have me with her. She was a widow, who had no family, and was much attached to her brother. A few years before she had visited him in England, and had then formed a strong attachment to me. I returned her kindness with gratitude and affection, but at that period was little capable of estimating her value. Nature had bestowed on her a superior understanding, which was highly cultivated. Her husband was a literary man, who had taken much pleasure in the improvement of her mind, and his success was equal to his wishes. But superior as she was in mind, she was still more distinguished by the benevolence of her heart; self had ever been her least object, and after the death of her husband, she devoted herself entirely to acts of beneficence.

My visit to her was productive of the most important consequences to me, and in some

measure decided my fate. She inspired me with a taste for reading, and led me to the attainment of knowledge, which expanded my mind, formed my judgment, and had the most beneficial effects on my conduct. But the benefit I derived from her did not rest here; she strengthened my love of virtue.— She did not permit me to be contented with befriending the unfortunate when they came in my way, but with the true spirit of benevolence, led me to seek them, and study the means of doing good. She taught me,

“ To exercise compassion; due to all

“ Who combat with distress.”

Often would she say,

“ Let tenderness

“ Sit brooding in your heart : she can create

“ Some thing equivalent to Angels here !”

My stay in Ireland was much longer than I expected. Soon after I left England, my father's regiment was ordered to the West-Indies, where he and my mother went, but they would not allow me to accompany them. My residence with my aunt, they thought

preferable for me in so many respects, that they insisted on my remaining with her till their return to Britain, which proved later than they intended.

By this means I continued four years in Ireland, which made me well acquainted with the country and its inhabitants. My aunt resided chiefly in the country, but she was frequently in Dublin, and occasionally visited various parts of the kingdom.

I made many agreeable acquaintance among the Irish, and became much attached to them, and to a country in which I passed my time so happily and beneficially. This attachment contributed to prevent my indulging local prejudices, which, indeed, had never taken root in my mind; for my father being Irish, my mother Scotch, and their family English, I had early been accustomed to regard, with equal partiality, the places to which they owed their birth; and thus trained, it required very little knowledge and reflection in more advanced years, to render me a citizen of the world, in the most unlimited sense.

When my father and mother returned to England, my aunt carried me to them, and passed some time with us before she returned to Ireland. My separation from her occasioned me much sorrow, and would have been still more painful, had she not promised to visit us frequently.

I was now in my twenty-third year, and although thought possessed of considerable beauty, had never been addressed by any man who interested me. I was not disposed to be easily pleased; but I was more indebted to my aunt for my freedom, than I then imagined; for she told me afterwards, that she had guarded me from every man she did not thoroughly approve, with the most vigilant, but secret care.

In my father's house my situation was entirely changed. He was Lieutenant-Colonel of his regiment, and his house was much resorted to by military men. I found myself daily surrounded by many who professed themselves my admirers; in spite of which, my indifference continued; because, the taste and habits I had acquired in the society of my aunt, rendered the company of many

I now associated with, insipid or disagreeable.

About two years after I came to England, Mr. Almoré got a company in my father's regiment, and had joined it but a short time before he became the favourite companion of my brother, then a captain in the same regiment.

My father and brother soon entertained the highest opinion of his character, and I thought his conversation and manners uncommonly agreeable. I soon found myself more pleased with his society, than with that of any other person; till by degrees, an affection, (the approaches of which I hardly perceived,) acquired such strength, that at length my happiness became entirely dependent upon it.

When I made this discovery, I was very far from being assured of any return of affection. I had sometimes fancied he did not regard me with indifference, but I was so diffident of it, as to doubt whether the most cautious observer could discern any thing in his behaviour, which could be at-

tributed to a stronger feeling than friendship, or politeness.

This uncertainty affected me extremely, and would have made me shun his society, had it been in my power; but he was so much with my brother, that it was impossible to avoid him.

From unhappiness, however, my behaviour to him became reserved; his conduct was influenced by mine, and the reserve became mutual.

The endeavour to conceal and subdue my affection, had only the effect of rendering me more unhappy; and I was in danger of sinking into a state of confirmed melancholy, when an incident occurred, which produced a change.

Sir William Estcourt, a young baronet in the neighbourhood of L——, where we resided, paid his addresses to me. His merit and fortune were such, that no woman in my situation, not strongly prepossessed in favour of another, could be supposed to reject him. His partiality for me had been for some time so observable, as to be noticed by my acquaintance; and when he took lodgings at

L——, that he might be near me, his motive was known.

My father and mother were not ignorant of it; and though they did not wish to control my inclination, they were very desirous I should marry him. It gave me much pain to disappoint them, but I could not hesitate as to the part I ought to act; for, prepossessed as I was in favour of Almorne, I should have thought it dishonorable to Sir William to become his wife, even though I had been willing to sacrifice my own peace to the wishes of my friends.

A few days after he came to L——, Almorne went to the country, from which he returned in a week so much indisposed, as to be confined to his apartment.

The day after my rejection of Sir William, my brother came into the room where I was sitting alone, and told me he had been inquiring after Almorne.

I asked how he did?

Better, answered he; and, after a pause, added, that he suspected health had little share in his confinement. I know not, continued my brother, if I do right in what I

am going to say, but I cannot think of concealing from you, that I believe the fear of seeing you married to Sir William Estcourt, has been the sole cause of his seclusion. I have long suspected his partiality for you, and my suspicions were confirmed by observing the manner in which he took flight, when Sir William fixed his residence near you.—When I went to call on him this morning, he pretended to be very ill; or rather being in reality sick with apprehension, he averted his face, while in a faint voice he asked after my family.

I told him they were well, and had been much engaged with Sir William Estcourt; the occasion of whose residence at L——, I supposed he knew.

At these words he betrayed so much agitation, that I had not the cruelty to persist in my design of trying him farther. I hastened to relieve him, and the changes his countenance underwent while I spoke, left me not a doubt of his affection for you. Unfortunately, his fortune does not permit him to marry; and I fear his attachment will only be unhappy for you both; for I am persuaded

your refusal of Sir William has been owing entirely to partiality for him. I have not been blind to it; and however I may regret, I cannot condemn an affection so deservedly placed,—and, as you were situated, so difficult to avoid. I hope fortune will yet be propitious; and, in the mean while, since you are determined to continue single for his sake, I wish you to have all the satisfaction which the certainty of his affection can afford.

I was excessively affected by this generous conduct in my brother, and as far as it was in my power endeavoured to show my sense of it. His behaviour was truly amiable, and disinterested; for my marriage with Sir William must have been attended with very important advantages to him, yet he had never in the smallest degree attempted to influence my conduct.

I was made happy by the discovery of Al-morne's affection; and now thought of repairing with caution, the late alteration in my behaviour. His supposed illness gave me an easy opportunity of doing this; and at our next meeting, I showed him an attention I had never done before. From that moment,

the ease of our former intercourse was renewed, and the hours I passed in his society, became daily more agreeable. Convinced of his affection, and believing my refusal of Sir William, and behaviour to other men, would give him a favourable opinion of me, I ventured to treat him with uniform kindness, and although he never dropped an expression, nor paid an attention, which could be construed into an indication of affection, yet the satisfaction which illumined his countenance, on receiving the least proof of kindness from me, sufficiently assured me of his attachment, and amply rewarded me for the unhappiness I had formerly suffered.

Nor was I without hope that the obstacles to our marriage might be removed. Our situation, though unfavourable for it at the time, was not such as to preclude prospect of amendment.

At seven years of age, Almorne had been left an orphan unprovided for. His father's first cousin and friend, Mr. Almorne, of Mount Almorne, generously took the charge of him, and educated him in the most liberal manner, along with his only son.

When he was sixteen, Mr. Almorne purchased an ensigncy for him, and afterwards a lieutenancy, but was so fond of him, that he endeavoured to get leave of absence for him, as often as he could; in consequence of which, Almorne was little separated from his patron, till he was twenty; and to this circumstance, he considered himself as chiefly indebted for having escaped the ignorance and habits of dissipation, so common among military men.

When he was twenty-two, his benefactor died, without having made any provision for him by Will, although he had frequently declared his intention of doing so. He had even talked with his attorney on the subject, and fixed various times for executing the business; but owing to indolence, and that extraordinary remissness, which many people have unaccountably shown about this most important concern, he died at last intestate, by which a number of persons were disappointed of legacies he had intended them.

Almorne was thus suddenly deprived of all hope of rising in his profession, for his young cousin had not the generosity of his late father,

and there was no other person by whose means he could hope to be promoted. Fortune, however, befriended him when he least expected it ; your father succeeded to the Ornvile estate, and soon after Almorne saw his name in the Gazette for a company, without knowing for some days to whom he was obliged.

Well may I revere your father ! whether I reflect on the excellence of his character, or on the influence it has had on my fate. It was to this generous act of friendship for Almorne, that I have been indebted for all the happiness I have known, or the little good I have been able to do.

This history of himself, Almorne gave my brother, soon after Sir William Escourt left L——, adding, that want of fortune allowed him little hope of having it in his power to marry. My brother understood his conversation as meant to prevent my mistaking his situation ; and to prevent mistakes on either side, he contrived to let him know my pecuniary prospects.

My father possessed little more than two thousand pounds, twelve hundred of which

were settled upon me, the rest upon my brother; but my mother was to enjoy the interest of the whole for her life, excepting six hundred pounds, which I was to receive upon marrying. My mother was also to have on the death of my father, an annuity of fifty pounds per annum, which had been settled upon her at her marriage by her father-in-law, and thus her income, if she survived her husband, was sufficient at that period of time, to maintain both her and myself in comfort.

This state of our finances did not afford much room for hope of my marriage with Al-morne, but neither did it lead me to despair of it in time; and from the rigid economy he practised, although a generous man, my brother believed he must have marriage in view, and would, at no very distant period, offer me his hand.

Thus did two years glide over, at the end of which, our situation was suddenly reversed by the death of my father. Under any circumstances I should have felt the loss of so excellent a parent a very heavy calamity, but when to it was added sorrow for my mother, and the prospect of speedy separation from

my brother and Almorne, you may easily imagine, I suffered from it in a way which it would not be easy to describe.

When my mother was able to settle the plan of her future life, she determined, at the request of my brother, to remain with the regiment while it continued in Britain, and then to pass some time with her friends in Scotland.

We were beginning to recover a little from the misfortune we had sustained, when the regiment was ordered to America in consequence of the war.

It was then I became fully sensible of the misery that might attend a soldier's life ; but I shall forbear to dwell on sufferings, which your own feelings will teach you but too well.

The distress of Almorne, though evidently great, was so far from inducing him to any avowal of affection, that he seemed sedulously to shun every opportunity of being with me alone.

Two days before his departure, my mother invited him, along with some other friends in the regiment, to dinner. The meeting was

melancholy, for every one of the company was grieved at the approaching separation.

In the evening, when all our visitors had left us except Almorne and a lady, the latter unwilling to take leave of my mother in her own house, requested her to take a walk, to which she reluctantly consented.

Almorne attended us, and we had gone but a little way out of town, when we were met by a friend in her carriage. She immediately invited my mother and her companion to take a seat in it, and my mother, glad to be released from the walk, prevailed on her friend to accept the offer, and thus Almorne and I were left to return alone.

He instantly proposed that we should regain the town by a shorter road than we had come ; I had no objection, and we proceeded through a field, at the end of which we turned into a lane. As we entered it, we saw a man approaching evidently intoxicated, who, the moment he perceived us, hastily advanced, and caught hold of me. Almorne, in an instant delivered me from his grasp, upon which the fellow enraged, turned upon him, and a contest began, the beginning only of

which I saw ; terror deprived me of my senses, and when I recovered, I found myself seated on a bench in the field, and supported by Almorne.

His safety was the first object of my care ; the concern I discovered about him—the joy I felt on being assured he was unhurt,—with the alarm he had suffered for me, overcame his resolution, and losing all reserve, he acknowledged his affection for me in the most impassioned terms.

I was too much agitated and confused to make any reply, but the manner in which I listened, was a sufficient testimony of my sympathy in his feelings.

It was long before he recovered any composure, but at length assuming a very serious air, he addressed me in the following words, every one of which remained engraven on my heart.

“ Although it is impossible you can be ignorant of the affection I have long entertained for you, yet to the strength of it you have probably been till now a stranger. Anxiety for your happiness made me conceal it,—yet I can scarcely regret your knowing before we

part, that I cherish an affection not unworthy of you.—From a very early period of our acquaintance, my sole hope of future happiness rested upon you ;—yet I would not permit myself to make any attempt to gain your affection. The doing so might, I thought, be injurious to you, and would be ungenerous to your father and brother, who showed me such distinguishing marks of friendship and esteem. They could not approve of your marrying a man entirely destitute of fortune, nor could I approve of it myself: my own dependent state as an orphan, has taught me too feelingly the consequences of a rash marriage. I flattered myself, however, that time might be propitious to my wishes, and had it not been for the war, I should soon have ventured to solicit your hand; but this unfortunate event has blasted all my hopes, and I would not now for the universe, propose a measure which would be so hazardous for you. Heaven knows, whether I shall survive the war, or to what condition it may reduce me!—At present, the world is nothing to me without you:—but dare I promise on the steadiness of my affec-

tion?—The future is dark and impenetrable; I see not in it a ray of hope.”

He stopt, and I said a few words in reply, expressive of gratitude for his generous concern for my happiness. I then rose, and we walked silently to the door of my mother's house, where we parted without exchanging a word.

I told my brother all that had passed, and he expressed high admiration of Almorne's behaviour. No man, he said, could promise more on constancy, or would more earnestly wish to enter into engagements were he not afraid of risking my happiness. His affection had made him always more solicitous for my interest than his own; and though he would not leave me ignorant of any circumstance in his situation, which it could be of importance to me to know, he had carefully avoided saying or doing any thing which could occasion me regret. From such a man, continued my brother, you have every thing to hope; he knows the sacrifices you have made, and daily make for him, and I am persuaded thinks himself as much bound to

you, as he could be by the most solemn engagement.

These assurances softened my unhappiness, and strengthened my approbation of a resolution I had long before taken, to continue single, if I could not be the wife of Almorne. The following day passed without my seeing him; and my brother told my mother that Almorne intreated her to forgive his not waiting upon her again, as he was unable to bid her farewell.

They departed next morning, and a few days after, my mother at my earnest request, quitted our abode. I fancied change of scene would lessen our grief, and that, however painful it was to leave those we loved, it was still more painful to remain in the place, where we were left by them.

We went first to visit a friend at a distance, with whom we spent some weeks, and from thence went to Scotland, where my mother found consolation in being with the friends and companions of her youth.

As Mrs. Almorne made a pause in this part of her story, Constantia observed how very

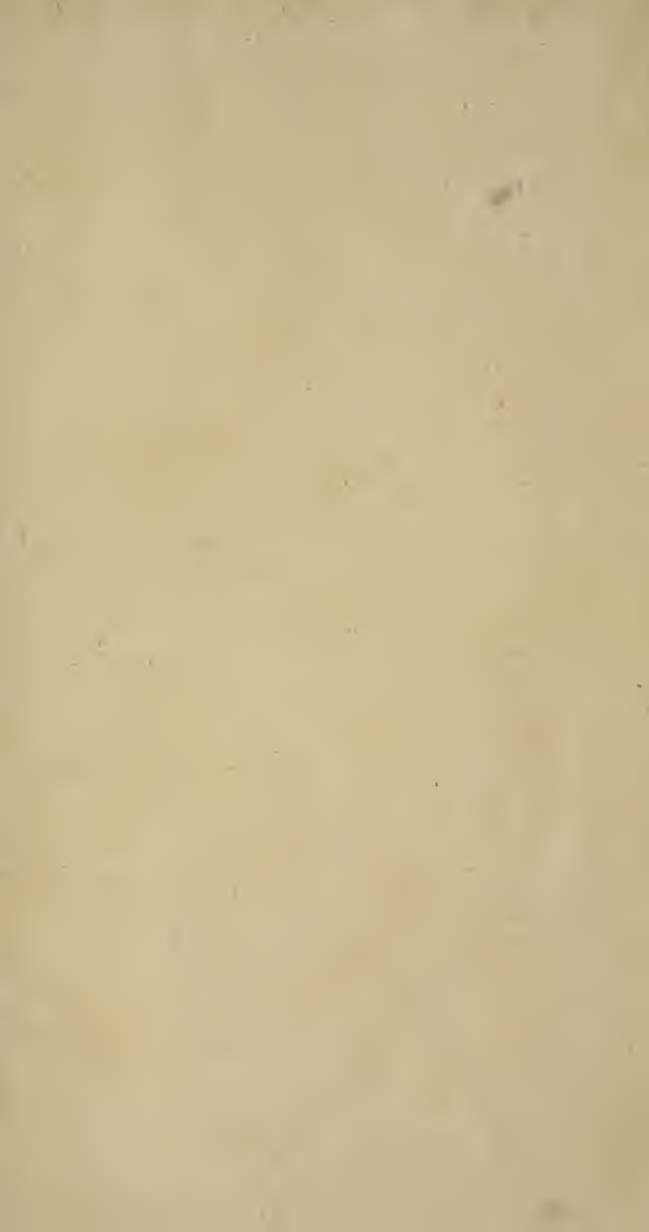
different Mr. Almorne's behaviour had been from Valmonsor's.

“ They might differ perhaps in judgment,” replied Mrs. Almorne, “ but you should consider how differently they were situated.”

“ How indulgent you are to the failings of others,” said Constantia: “ when you cannot justify, you seek at least to palliate them.”

“ This is merely an attempt to do justice, from experience having taught me, that our conduct is often justly influenced by circumstances which escape observation. I shall delay the sequel of my little story till the evening, when you will find, that though my separation from Almorne, was at first less painful than yours from Valmonsor, it became afterwards far more afflicting, than I trust yours can ever be.”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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